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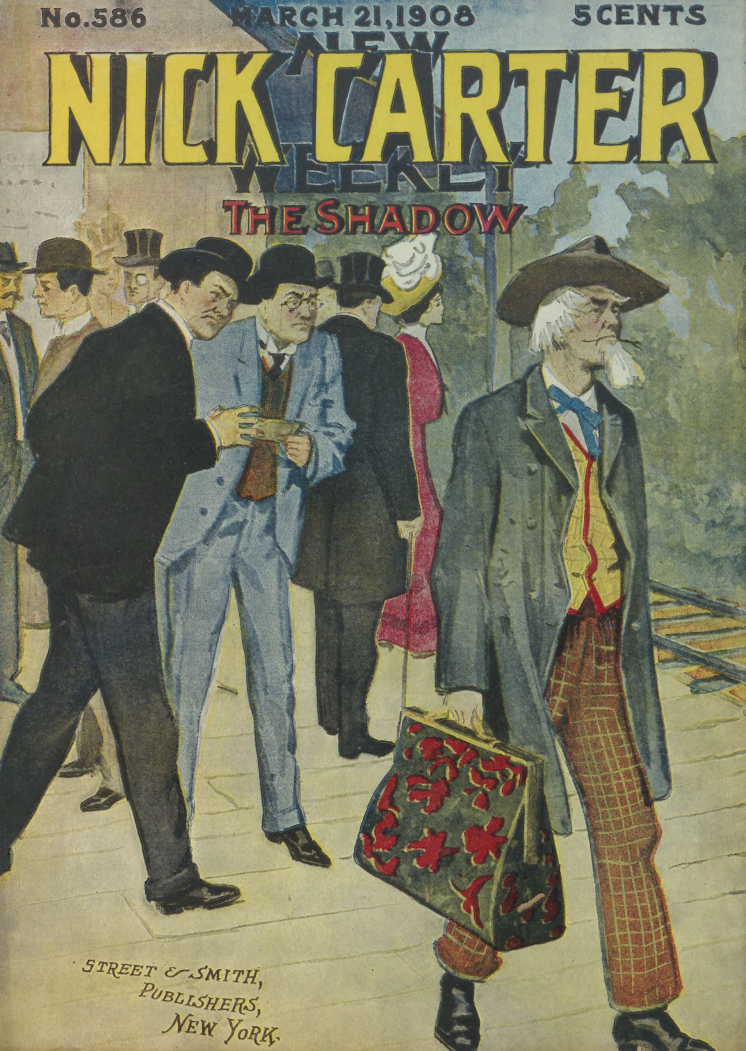
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE SHADOW



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE "SHADOW";

OR,

Nick Carter's Mysterious Pursuer.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS PURSUER.

Nick Carter had been conscious for several days that some one was following him, and he was gradually coming to the conclusion that the "some one," whoever he might be, was a positive genius at the art of shadowing.

For the first time in his life the detective had to confess himself entirely at fault. He had resorted to every expedient known to himself to catch this particular "shadow," but he had been outmatched in every effort made.

So expert was the fellow that there were times when Nick asked himself if it was not all his own imagination; if he were not entirely mistaken in this idea of his that a person was following him wherever he went, keeping tabs on everything that he did, watching every move he made, and otherwise acting literally as a genuine shadow, which one cannot lose, no matter how dim the light.

Did it ever occur to you that you always cast a shadow, even in the darkest night; even in the blackest room at midnight?

It is true. There are always rays of light around us, even if the human eye cannot distinguish them, and wherever there are rays of light interrupted by the passage of an opaque body, there must necessarily be a shadow.

In the bright sunlight one may see his own shadow distinctly; in a half-light one may discern it dimly; where there is barely enough light to distinguish objects, one may not see the shadow at all; and yet it is there, and you know it is there.

So it was with the detective in this particular case.

It was like walking in the dimmest sort of light and knowing the shadow is beside you, and yet being totally unable to see its outlines.

How did he know that the "shadow" was near him if he could not distinguish it? Well, there are many questions that are more easily asked than answered; just as there are many things which one knows without being able to explain *how* one knows them.

Have you never been seated in a large room where there were perhaps hundreds of people, and suddenly become conscious that out of those hundreds there was one person somewhere behind you whose eyes were, figuratively, boring into your head? Have you never

turned suddenly at such a time, to encounter those eyes; to send your own glance straight to them, selecting them out of all the hundreds by the aid of that subconsciousness which you cannot explain?

That is precisely the way it was with Nick in this case.

Wherever he went he knew perfectly well that a pair of eyes were upon him; that an intelligence was watching him; that a human being was pursuing him.

Hundreds of times he had turned about suddenly to encounter—nothing.

Scores of times he had deliberately led the "shadow" into places where he believed he would have no difficulty in "spotting" him; but each time he had been no wiser than before he made the attempt.

The "shadow" avoided him with infinite tact, with wonderful skill, and with an ingenuity that was akin to devilish.

It so happened that the detective was entirely alone during this trying time. That is to say, both his assistants were away. Even Danny was gone, too, for Patsy and his wife had taken him with the big touring-car for a trip through the South; and Chick had gone to Canada on a case for Chief Murray. Both had been gone two weeks, and there was little prospect that either would return for another month.

"I wonder if I'm getting dippy?" Nick mused to himself as he entered his house one evening about eight, and, having handed his hat to Joseph, ascended to his study, where he intended to pass the evening in reading.

To his surprise there was an envelope lying upon his table addressed to himself. Joseph had said nothing about such a letter; had not mentioned the evident fact that a messenger had been to the house—and Joseph was not one who was apt to forget or neglect such things.

The detective picked up the letter, examined the handwriting on the envelope for a moment, saw that it was addressed in a fine, bold hand, in which there had apparently been no effort at a disguise, wondered for an instant if the handwriting was or was not familiar, decided at last that it was not, and broke the seal.

But even a greater surprise awaited him as he read. For the sake of the interest in this story we will give the contents of that letter.

"Nicholas Carter," it read. "For reasons best known to myself, the writer of this letter, and reasons which need not be explained to you at present, it has become necessary to keep watch of your movements for a while. I have noticed during the last few days that you have, somehow, been made conscious of the fact that you are followed; that you are constantly under my eye. I know that you have not seen me, have not spotted me at all, and hence I must attribute your knowledge of my proximity to that sixth sense which, for want of a better term, we call subconsciousness.

"I have watched your efforts to discover me with some amusement, for that they have been and will continue to be fruitless you are almost prepared to admit:

"You are not to regard this letter as in any way a threatening one, for no threats are made, as you have already discovered. What may happen in the future, as a logical result of this espionage, I cannot now say. Time alone can determine that; but in order that you may be made fully aware that you cannot make a move, utter a word, or do a thing which will not be observed by me, and therefore known to me, I have decided to send you every day a report of your doings, just as if I were in your employ, and you—the man I am following—were a client who demanded a detailed report daily of the other fellow. See?

"It is all very clear, isn't it?

"I enclose herewith the first report. It is of your movements yesterday; those for to-day have not been written up as yet, but to-morrow evening, or possibly some time during the day, you will receive it. If you discover any errors in the reports, I beg that you will consider how slight they are under the circumstances. I sign myself

THE SHADOW."

There was a second sheet of paper in the envelope, and this the detective read with considerable interest. It ran:

"C. left his home at 8:43 A. M. Walked to Waldorf Hotel. Encountered an acquaintance named Greenville. Passed ten minutes in conversation with him. Subject of talk, financial condition of the times. Balance of talk of no importance to anybody. What is called 'small talk.' Went to subway at 33d Street; boarded train at 9:24; left train at Astor Place; walked to Broadway and down Broadway to Bleecker Street, through Bleecker to Mulberry, and called at police headquarters; sent card to commissioner, and was received; remained one hour with the commissioner; subject of consultation not known. Left headquarters at 11:15; walked to the office of Printers' Publishing Company on Waverly Place. Passed three-quarters of an hour there in conversation with the editor; subject unknown and immaterial. Walked from there to Astor Place station of subway, rode to 28th Street; from there walked home, arriving at 12:30. Remained in house till 4 P. M. Drove out with new trotting mare at 4:10. Rode through park and up St. Nicholas Avenue to Speedway. Took one turn, and drove to stable in 52d Street. Left horse there and walked all the way home, stopping only at a cigar-store for cigars. Remained at home during evening. Retired—estimated by appearance of lights in house—at 11."

The detective read this rather remarkable report through to the end twice; then he put it carefully on his wire file, and stood for a moment, scowling out of the window.

"It is correct in every detail," he mused presently. "Of course there happens to be nothing in it which the poorest shadow in the world could not have spotted; but it remains a fact just the same that although I knew I was followed, and although I drove through the park and to the Speedway purposely because I believed I could spot the shadow, I did not succeed in doing so.

"The fellow is undeniably clever. The question is, What is he up to?

"By Jove! I am learning by this business something of the way it makes one feel to know that one is shadowed, and yet be unable to spot the shadow. It is my first experience at that sort of thing."

After a moment more he rang for Joseph, and when he appeared, asked abruptly:

"Joseph, how came this letter here?" And he pointed to the envelope which still lay on the table where the letter had been.

Joseph looked mystified.

"What letter, sir? That letter? I know nothing about it, sir."

"Wasn't it brought here by a messenger?"

"It was not delivered to me, sir. I have never seen it before."

"Has there been no messenger at the house to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Who *has* been here? Who came to the house to see me while I was out?"

"Nobody, sir."

"Have you been out yourself?"

"I was out half an hour, sir, to attend to those errands you gave me this morning."

"Who attended the door during your absence?"

"I left it in charge of Margaret, sir; but when I returned she informed me that nobody had called while I was away."

"I found that letter on my table where you see the envelope lying now, when I entered the study half an hour ago," said the detective.

"Yes, sir. I know nothing about it."

"It couldn't have got there without hands, could it?"

"I should suppose not, sir."

"You are the only person who is supposed to enter this room during my absence, unless the lads are here. But they are not here now. Somebody has been in this room. Who was it?"

"Alas! sir, I do not know."

"Were you in this room at all while I was out this afternoon?"

"No, sir."

"Has the door been unlocked at all, with your knowledge, since I closed it shortly after noon to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Go below and send Margaret to me; or, better, bring her here."

"Yes, sir, at once. I hope, sir, that you do not think I have been remiss in my duties?"

"I don't suppose so, Joseph. If you have, it would be the first time. But something has happened here which for the moment I cannot explain, and for which I think it necessary to find an explanation. While you are going after Margaret, I want you to think over carefully every incident, trivial or otherwise, that has happened since I went out after luncheon. Possibly you have forgotten something which may make all this clear."

"It is possible, sir, but I do not think I have."

With that he went in search of Margaret.

CHAPTER II.

IS THERE A TRAITOR IN THE HOUSEHOLD?

"Margaret," said the detective, as soon as the maid was brought to him, "when Joseph went out shortly after luncheon to-day, to attend to some errands for me, he left you in charge of the door, did he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many times did the bell ring during his absence?"

"Once, sir."

"Why," exclaimed Joseph, "you told me that nobody had called while I was out."

"Nobody did call, Joseph. I will——"

"That will do, if you please," interrupted the detective. "Joseph, I will thank you to remain silent while I am talking. Another break like that and you will receive a very long vacation."

"Please pardon me, sir."

"Now, Margaret, who rang the bell that once, that you refer to?"

"A gentleman, sir, who wished to inquire in which house the Granbys live. He said he knew it was right along here, but he had forgotten the number. I told him it was the fourth house down the avenue, and he thanked me and went away. That was all there was of it, and I didn't consider that a call."

"Quite right, Margaret. What sort of a looking gentleman was he?"

"Very fine-looking, sir; and quite young. I should think he was not more than twenty-one or two, at most."

"Now, wait a moment. Pass me the telephone-book, Joseph."

A moment later he asked for the telephone number of the Granbys, and presently over the phone he inquired:

"Am I speaking to Mr. Granby?"

"Yes," came the reply. "Who are you?"

"Your neighbor, Mr. Nicholas Carter."

"Ah, yes. How are you, Mr. Carter? What can I do for you?"

"This: A gentleman who was about twenty or twenty-one years old came to my door to-day, and made inquiries for your house. It happened soon after one o'clock this afternoon. I wish to know if he did actually wish to find your house, or if his inquiry was only a blind for getting at my door. Will you ask the members of your family if such a person called there about that time to-day?"

"Yes; hold the wire."

There was a considerable wait after that, and then Mr. Granby called "Hello!"

"Yes," said the detective. "I am waiting."

"There was no such person here, Mr. Carter."

"Thank you. I had already guessed that there was not, but I wished to make sure. Thank you again. Good-by;" and he replaced the receiver.

"Now, Margaret," he continued, addressing the maid, "how long a time was Joseph gone?"

"About three-quarters of an hour, sir."

"How soon after he went out were you called to the door to reply to the ring of the man who wanted to find the Granbys?"

"It was almost immediately. Joseph could not have more than got around the corner."

"Did the man turn away from the door and descend the steps after you had answered his questions?"

"He turned away from the door, sir; I did not wait to see if he descended the steps, but I supposed he did, of course."

"You did not remain near the door, then, while Joseph was out?"

"No, sir. I was ironing out some things of my own, the irons were heated, and I wanted to finish them at once."

"So you went at once to the kitchen, did you, after the man called?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you come up-stairs again before Joseph returned?"

"N-no, sir."

"I am afraid, Margaret, that I will have to dispense with your services if that is the way in which you carry out my orders. You have been told that when Joseph leaves you in charge of the door, you are to occupy his chair, and not leave your post until he returns. You were perfectly well aware of the existence of that order. I feel that I ought to send you away."

"Oh, please don't, Mr. Carter. I don't want to go. I won't disobey you again; really, I won't, Mr. Carter."

"I will give you your two weeks' notice, Margaret, just the same. Whether I retain your services longer than that depends entirely upon yourself. You may go, Joseph, you may remain a moment. I have not quite done with you yet."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to tell me when was the last time that your key to this room was out of your possession."

"My key to this room? Really, sir, I——"

"Wait a moment, Joseph. It has been out of your possession, at one time or another, within the last few weeks. I know that that must be the case. Now, think a moment. It was only the week before last that we had the room thoroughly dismantled and cleaned. Everything was carried out of it at that time, and temporarily stood in the hall. Now——"

"Yes, sir; I do remember."

"I thought you would. Tell me about it."

"It was while the room was being cleaned, sir."

"Naturally. I don't think you would let it go for a moment otherwise. Now, tell me the circumstance."

"Well, sir, it was this way: As you say, everything was out in the hall while the room was being scrubbed and cleaned. Two of the servants were working up here at the room, when the door was caught by a draft and blown shut. They had forgotten to spring the latch, and, of course, it locked."

"Of course."

"Margaret called down to me from the top of the stairs that the door was locked against them, and asked me to go up and open it; and then she ran part way down the stairs and told me to pass her the key and she would toss it down to me. I gave her my bunch of keys, showing her which was the one. She ran back up the stairs. I heard her open the door, and then she tossed the keys back down to me."

"Very good. That is a sufficient explanation."

"I hope that I did nothing wrong, sir."

"Well, it was wrong in principle to let the keys go out of your possession, even for a moment; but your action was a perfectly natural one under the circumstances. The next time, however, it will be better if you ascend the stairs and unlock the door yourself. That will do, Joseph. You may go now."

The detective remained quite silent for a long time after the departure of Joseph; but at last he murmured to himself:

"So; I have got some sort of a traitor in my house, have I? And that traitor is Margaret, too. I wonder if she is innocent in the matter, or if she is really a traitor? It is hard to believe that she would wilfully assist any person who was inimical to me. I think I will have to wait and see, and in the meantime not permit her to suppose that I am suspicious at all."

He turned to the telephone again, and called up an expert locksmith who frequently did work for him, asking

him to come around to the house the first thing in the morning; and when the man did put in an appearance the following morning, the lock on the study door was replaced by another and even more complicated one, and the latch on the street door was also changed; and, while these changes were going on, Margaret was sent out on errands that would detain her till the two jobs were finished.

Nick did not leave the house himself until the middle of the forenoon; and then he went out prepared to give his "shadow" the time of his life; and also prepared to spot him, if such a thing were possible.

It was rather trying to the detective to think that a man could defy him in this manner.

He had never known the time before when he could not tell instantly if he was followed, and when he could not, almost without difficulty, discover the person who was doing the following.

But this shadow, who dogged his steps so persistently, seemed to be immune from discovery, and Nick was not only piqued, but he felt that his entire fund of resources was called upon to find the man.

If Chick or Patsy, or both of them, had been at home, Nick would have set them on his own track, or he would have rigged Chick up to represent himself, while he followed in disguise some distance behind, and in that way they would, he thought, have been able to catch the shadow.

But both the assistants were away, and Nick had to work alone. Doubtless the shadow had purposely selected that very time for his efforts.

But what was the object? Nick asked himself frequently.

If revenge for some fancied wrong were intended, surely the man was taking his time about it.

"I wonder if he is merely trying to make me nervous?" he thought once. "If that is really what he is up to, he is succeeding rather better than I would have supposed he could. I would not have guessed that anybody could make me nervous in such a way; but, after all, it is only annoyance, not nervousness."

When he left his house it was eleven o'clock, and he hurried on foot directly to the garage where he kept his automobile.

It was not there, of course, but it was an easy matter to hire another, and just now he intended to hire two of them.

He called the manager of the garage to him as soon as he arrived there, and, having led him away into a corner, said:

"I want two automobiles this morning, if you please. I am trying a little trick on a man who is endeavoring to be fresh with me. Do you understand?"

"Yes; I think so."

"I want you to be particular that no whisper of this arrangement between us gets beyond your own knowledge."

"I think you know that you can rely upon me, Mr. Carter."

"I do. Now, here is a blank card that I have torn in half; see? I want you to take one half of it and I will retain the other. I want you to let me have that big, high-power runabout without a chauffeur, and I will get into it and drive away. After I have been gone fifteen minutes, I want you to call one of your best chauffeurs aside and tell him to take another car, and drive with it to Number 89 Throckmorton Street, in Jersey City Heights. When he arrives there he is to stop before the house and remain there until a gentleman shows him the other half of that card you will give him. When he receives it and finds that it fits, he is to do exactly as that gentleman tells him. Will you do that?"

"Certainly. Rather mysterious, isn't it?"

"That remains to be seen. I hope it is. Now, get me the runabout."

Five minutes later Nick drove alone out of the garage.

CHAPTER III.

SCORE ONE FOR THE SHADOW.

The street that comes next to Throckmorton is Felsner, and Nick had a friend in Felsner Street who, in turn, had a brother who lived on Throckmorton, directly behind him. The brothers had made a door in the fence between their adjoining lots, and visited each other in that way instead of going all the way around, as they would otherwise have been forced to do.

The detective had figured out that he might succeed in throwing his shadow off the scent by the plan he had adopted, and he was resolved to try it, at least.

Accordingly he drove the runabout directly to Felsner Street, and stopped it before the house of his friend.

There he passed about twenty minutes in conversation with his friend, during which he explained, in part, what had brought him there; then together they passed through to the other house which fronts on Throckmorton Street, to discover that the other automobile had just arrived in front of the house.

"Now," said Nick to his friend, "will you go outside and tell that chauffeur that there is a gentleman inside here who has a half a card he wishes to show him? Then bring him in with you."

It was done, and as soon as the chauffeur was in the detective's presence he showed him the card; and when the man was satisfied that it fitted perfectly, he said:

"I was told to take my orders from you, sir. What are they?"

"You will leave the machine you brought here where

it is. Presently I will take it away with me. After a little you will go with this gentleman through the back yard to a house on the adjoining street, where you will find the runabout that I brought away from the garage. You will wait about half an hour longer after you are in the other house, after which you will put on your mask and take the runabout back to the garage. Is that clear enough?"

"Quite so."

"You may take your time about it, and go as slow as you please. If anybody should question you, supply no information whatever upon any subject. Are you on?"

"I am."

"Now, I will ask you to exchange coat and cap and goggles with me. Mine is tan and yours is black, so it will be quite a change. We will exchange back again later in the day."

"Very good, sir."

"If any one should *try* to question you, I want you to be particular to notice that person carefully, so you will be able to describe him to me. Will you do that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I think I will be going."

When the detective entered the car the chauffeur had brought to him, he drove it by devious ways and through streets that were little frequented until he was at a considerable distance from where he had made the exchange; and then he struck directly upon Montgomery Street, and went directly down that thoroughfare to the Jersey City ferry.

From there he took the Twenty-third Street ferry to the city, and thence he made his way directly to the garage, as he had intended to do, arriving long before the chauffeur with the other car could hope to do.

He had made no particular effort to discover if he was followed on that trip, going in either direction. He contented himself with waiting for the promised reports, for he had no doubt they would come.

But he felt that if the report of that morning happened to be correct, he would have to get down to some particular scheme for outwitting the man who was shadowing him.

From the garage he returned home, and remained there without going out again that day, for there were many things he wished to do in the house, and there was nothing in particular to call him out.

At half-past six that evening, while he was at dinner, the door-bell rang, and presently Joseph appeared bearing an envelope addressed in the same handwriting as that mysterious one that had been delivered so strangely.

It contained the report, of course, for the preceding day; not for the one that was just passing; nevertheless, the detective read it with considerable interest, finding it correct as far as it went, and substantially complete, at that.

The day following he had business which called him over to Philadelphia, where he spent several hours, returning and arriving at his home soon after five that afternoon; and the last mail of the day brought him an envelope in the handwriting he had now learned to know.

He opened it with more interest than he would have believed he could have felt over a matter that was really so trivial; and he read:

"C. received an early call from his locksmith, who put new locks on the doors of his private study and the street door. This was unnecessary, but I suppose it amused him to have the change made. C. went out at eleven; went to garage at Broadway and —th Street, where he keeps his own car when it is in the city. Hired a runabout and presently went away with it. Before leaving held lengthy conversation with manager of garage. Was seen to tear a card in half and give one of the halves to manager. Drove the runabout to 88 Felsner Street, Jersey City. Entered the house and presently passed through the yard to No. 89 Throckmorton Street. Remained there nearly half an hour, when he came out of 89 Throckmorton Street and drove away with another car which had been taken there for him by a chauffeur who carried the torn half of card he had given to garage manager. Drove to ferry, crossed to Twenty-third Street, and went from there to garage. Then returned home and remained there."

The detective was amazed.

He had not believed it possible that this report of his movements with the two automobiles could be correct; but there it was in black and white, as plain as day.

The shadow was absolutely correct.

Either he had been able to follow the car in which Nick had ridden that day, and had somehow surmised that such a change would be made, and had seen him when he came out of the house in Throckmorton Street, or there was a big system of betrayal at work—but he knew, even when it occurred to him, that this latter hypothesis could not be correct.

He resolved then and there that he would call Margaret to him and have it out with her at once, instead of waiting and watching her, as he had intended to do.

He called her into the study and indicated a chair that she was to occupy; then he stood looking down at her, and began:

"Margaret, do you recall an occasion when you were cleaning this room not long ago, when the door blew shut, or was purposely closed and locked, so that you were compelled to ask Joseph for the key?"

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"What did you do with that key when it was given to you by Joseph?"

"Why, I unlocked the door with it."

"Naturally. But what else did you do with it?"

"I returned it to Joseph, of course."

"But there was still another thing you did with it, Margaret."

"No, sir. If there was, I don't remember it."

"What did you have in your hand besides the key when you took it from Joseph?"

"I think it was a cloth, sir."

"Try to recall the fact that you also held a piece of soft substance, like wax, in your hand, and that you pressed the key against it hard enough to leave an impression there."

"I don't remember any such thing, sir."

"Margaret, you are deceiving me, and if you continue to do that, I shall end by sending you down to police headquarters. You don't want to go there, do you?"

"No, sir; no."

"That day when I called you into this room and questioned you about your attendance upon the front door while Joseph was absent, this room was entered by a stranger. I know now that you had provided that stranger with the means of doing that. I know that you had taken an impression of the key and passed it over to him, and that he made a key from that impression. I know also that he was supplied with an impression of the night-key to the front door of the house, and that he must have procured that through your aid, also. Now, I want you to make a full and complete confession to me. Otherwise——" and he paused significantly.

"Well, I didn't, then!" Margaret was getting angry and, therefore, saucy. "You can get somebody else to do my work, Mr. Carter; and as for your notice—you can pay me up to-day, and I'll leave right away."

"Certainly, you will leave at once. I had intended that you should; but you will go to the station-house, under arrest. It is just as much a theft to do what you did as if you had taken a watch out of that desk and disposed of it."

"I didn't steal anything."

"Yes, you did; you stole the impression of that key. Now, if you will make a full confession to me, tell me why you did it, who you did it for, what your remuneration was, and what other inducements you were offered, I will perhaps forgive you; but unless you do make full confession, I shall be obliged to send you to jail, and from there—well, it may go hard with you."

"I haven't got anything to confess at all, sir."

"Do you persist in that attitude?"

"There ain't no other attitude for me to take."

"Won't you tell me who the man was who induced you to take the impression of my key?"

"There wasn't any man, I tell you."

"Woman, then?"

"Or woman, either."

"Is there no way to induce you to talk?"

"I ain't got anything to talk about."

Nick pulled the telephone toward him and spoke through it to headquarters; from there he was connected with the nearest station-house, and then he asked that an officer be sent around at once. He believed that if he carried the thing far enough he could succeed in frightening the woman.

But she only sat there and smiled while they awaited the arrival of the officer.

When he came and Joseph had taken him to the study, Nick tried again.

"Margaret," he said, "do you want to go with this officer to the station-house?"

"No," she replied. "I don't want to, but I suppose I'll have to—for the present. But I am no fool, Mr. Carter. You won't keep me long. You make a charge against me for which you haven't an atom of proof. You know and I know that you can't prove a thing that you say about me. You say that I took an impression of that key; I say I didn't. My word in a court of law is just as good as yours. I didn't have that key in my possession two minutes. You haven't said that you lost anything out of this room or out of the house. You have only said that the doors were opened. Well, prove it, if you can."

All this was perfectly true, and Nick was entirely aware of it.

Margaret was right in her defiance of him, and he knew all the time that he could do nothing with her.

He had discovered now that he could not frighten her, either, and he sat there for a moment staring at her while he was busily thinking.

"Very well," he said, after a moment. "You may return to the station-house, officer. Margaret, you may go to your room and pack your things. Joseph will pay you when you are ready to leave. Go, now, and remember I had rather you had actually stolen from me, than to have betrayed me. Go!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE DETECTIVE BECOMES A CLIENT.

While Margaret was packing her trunk, Nick telephoned to police headquarters, and asked that a good man be detailed to assist him for a day or two, and that he be sent up at once; and so it happened that when Margaret did finally leave the detective's house, there was a man on her trail whose duty it was to report everything concerning her movements that he could find out for the next twenty-four hours.

Nick's next act after attending to that was to make use of the long-distance phone, and to get in conversation with Conroy Conner, at Washington.

"Con," he said to him over the wire, "I want you to

come up here on the midnight train, if your chief will let you off for a day or two. I am badly in need of assistance just now, and both my lads are away. Do you think you can make it?"

"Why, yes, I guess so. What's up? What sort of a case is it?"

"It's no case at all. It is merely something in which I need help, and I want you to assist me, if you will."

"Sure I will. But tell me something about it."

"It will keep till you get here, Con. I will look for you in the morning? Eh?"

"Sure thing, Nick."

The detective was awaiting the arrival of his friend when Conner walked in soon after six o'clock the following morning. An early breakfast was waiting, too, and they sat down together.

"Pleasure first and business afterward, Con," said Nick. "We'll eat our fill, and then go to my study, where we can talk things over."

"All right, old man. Just as you say."

And so, half an hour later, they were closeted together in the detective's study, with cigars alight, and prepared to go over the entire matter that had so puzzled the detective.

"To begin with, Con," said Nick, "I have had the uneasy feeling for almost two weeks that I was followed and spied upon wherever I happened to go. I was never quite positive about it, but yet I was always reasonable sure of it."

"Well, didn't you make any effort to be positive one way or another?"

"Certainly I did; a great many of them. But I could never nail anything. I had begun to think, in fact, that I must be mistaken, when I received proof positive that I was correct."

"Oh; you did find out, eh?"

"No; the shadow—that is what I call the fellow for want of a better name—began one day to send me reports of what I had done and where I had gone the preceding day. I get 'em every day now. There is a bunch of three or four that you may look over later. I will tell you now that they are correct."

"Do you mean to tell me, Nick, that you haven't been able to spot the shadow?"

"Exactly that, Con."

"But I always thought that was dead easy—to get onto a chap who was trying to dog me."

"So did I. I have often wondered how I could do the act of shadowing so successfully myself, and yet always be able to detect another when it was tried on me. I have found out, now, that there is one shadow whom I cannot detect."

"And is that what you have brought me here for?"

"Precisely that."

"Just to help you catch the shadow?"

"Yes."

"What is the game? What is he up to?"

"I don't know. That is one of the puzzles, and the biggest one, too."

"Have any attacks been made upon you? Has he tried to assassinate you, or anything like that?"

"No. There hasn't a thing been done that I could find fault with; but I cannot avoid the feeling that the shadow—or his employer—is only biding his time; is only getting me sufficiently worked up to please him, and that then there will be something doing."

"It does have that look. But, all the same, Nick, I don't see why you can't catch on, at one time or another, about who is following you. It stands to reason, of course, that it isn't always the same fellow who is on your track. Doubtless there are half a dozen of them."

"Perhaps more, possibly less," replied Nick. "There may be only three or four, and there may be any number. I am inclined to the opinion that there are a good many, Con."

"Yes. It looks that way."

"And if there are many, then it follows logically that they are all under the pay of some one man who is directing the affair."

"Of course."

"Well, there is where the shoe pinches. What is he doing it for? No man can carry on an affair of that kind without paying out a lot of money. A shadow as expert as any one of these are, would draw anywhere from ten to twenty-five dollars a day and his expenses. If there are three or four of them, the expense would mount up rather high, while if there are a half-dozen or a dozen, as I am inclined to think, the sum would be enormous."

"Sure thing."

"Now, it follows again that a man isn't throwing away all that money on such an enterprise just for the fun of the thing. There must be some deep motive behind it."

"That's true."

"What is it, Con? I confess that I have cudgeled my brain until it is sore, and I cannot dig up a single logical motive."

"Somebody is probably looking for your scalp."

"Then why doesn't somebody take it? No; it isn't that."

"It must be an enemy who is doing it. A friend would scarcely undertake such a thing."

"I agree with you there; and it is certain that I have enemies enough. But if it is an enemy who is trying to get even with me for something, how is he trying to do it?"

"It does look queer, Nick."

"For once in my life I am going to be the client in a detective case, and engage you to act for me. I am like

a doctor when he gets sick. He doesn't know how to prescribe for himself at all, but he sends out at once for another practitioner to take care of him."

"Yes; and I am told that doctors are usually more frightened when they are sick than any of their patients ever are."

"Well, that's reasonable, for who understands so well as a doctor, how little any of them know about the commonest ailments? But here is a case where I don't know which way to turn, for the reason that the man who is pursuing me keeps himself in the dark, and doesn't make a move to develop his own side of the case."

"Possibly it is some one who thinks to discover in this way a means of discrediting you, Nick."

"I have thought of that, too; but it won't hold water. My life has always been clean, and everybody in New York knows it. A man who undertook such a scheme as that would be worse than a fool; and this fellow in this case is no fool."

"If we only had a motive——" began Conner.

"That is just the sticking-point. We haven't any, and there doesn't seem to be any."

"But there *must* be one."

"Sure, Con; and that is what I want you to discover."

"If you can't find it, I don't know how you expect me to do it."

"There is only one method, Con."

"What is that?"

"We must put our heads together and figure out some way by which we can drop onto one of the lot and capture him."

"Well, we ought to be able to do that."

"What have you got to suggest, Con?"

"Nothing, just at the moment; but something will occur to me presently."

"I have just discharged a servant of whom I have come to believe that she is one of the lot. It is true that she has been with me three months, and I have always found her satisfactory, while, on the other hand, it isn't yet three weeks since this thing began. But I believe she took an impression of the key to that door behind you, and I think she did other things, too."

"Why didn't you keep her here instead of firing her?"

"I did intend to do that at first, but it turned out to be impossible. I have got a central-office man on her track now. He will bring me a report some time to-day. Now, what is your idea? Shall we go out together to-day, and let you see for yourself that the shadow cannot be spotted, or shall I go out and let you trail along after me, and see what you can do in that way?"

"I think we will go together. By the way, have you tried to spring any of your quick changes on these fellows, Nick?"

"No. I haven't thought it was any use."

"Suppose we both try it to-day."

"I'll do anything that you say. I am entirely in your hands, Con."

"Then make yourself a sort of a walking costumer, and lend me enough stuff so that I can do the same. I never knew your equal for quick changes, Nick, and surely you ought to be able to fool these fellows."

"It isn't so much that I wish to fool them as it is that I think by doing so we will be beter able to discover who one or more of them are."

"Sure."

"What would you suggest in the way of a disguise, to begin with?"

"Your best, whatever that is."

"I used to make use of one that I haven't tried out in years. The times for it have changed; but I think I could modify it so that it would be all right now. My name for it was Joshua Juniper."

"I remember it. Yes; try that one."

"If I try it at all, Con, I mean to do it very thoroughly."

"Sure. All the better."

"Very well. Then I have this to suggest: I am going to leave you here in charge of everything while I take a trip out of town. I'll carry a big satchel with me, and in it I will put all the things I think I may wish to use before I return to this room again. I'll find a place out in the country somewhere to make a Joshua Juniper of myself, and when I return to town I'll go straight to the Mammoth and register. I'll be a countryman who has sold his place and is prepared to spend a few hundred dollars to see the sights, and I'll exert myself to do the thing up brown."

"That sounds good, as far as it goes. What am I to do?"

"You are to let circumstances direct that. I will blow in at the Mammoth some time late this afternoon, but before dark. You will know that I am there and will hang around until I see you. When we see each other, we will not speak, of course; but after that you can regulate your own actions by mine or not, just as you deem best at the time, and under the circumstances that may exist."

"All right, Nick. I think that is a good starter."

"And I'll engage that nobody will see me when I change my disguise, or will have an opportunity to know that I have changed. Now, do we understand each other?"

"I think so."

"Then let's get about it at once."

CHAPTER V.

NICK CARTER ADOPTS A PERFECT DISGUISE.

The detective felt a great deal more confidence in the situation, now that he had Conner with him, for he knew

that he could depend upon him as absolutely as upon himself.

He had resolved upon a course which he believed would work splendidly, and the very fact that his own footsteps were dogged rendered it all the more promising.

The readers of the Nick Carter histories who have followed them for several years will recall a disguise that Nick formerly made frequent use of, and this was the one that he intended now to don first.

He still had his old Juniper costume safely preserved, and now he packed it in his satchel, together with many other things that he thought he might require before he should return to that room, and presently he left the house and started for the train.

The Joshua Juniper costume was a storehouse in itself; that was why he had formerly used it so much; because he could start out in that rig and assume half a dozen others before he returned without the necessity of going anywhere to dress.

He went now directly to the Grand Central Station and boarded a train that was soon to start.

It was a local that made every stop along the line all the way to New Haven; but Nick left it at Harrisons, and, with his grip in hand, started to walk straight back into the country.

He selected the most infrequented roads he could find, and several times stopped and rested beside the road, just for the purpose of discovering if he was followed.

There were three other passengers who got down from the train when he did, all men; but not one of them appeared to even glance in his direction, and if by any chance they were following or watching him, they certainly did nothing to give him cause to think so.

Two of them appeared to be together; the third seemed to be waiting for some one, as if he were expected there at the station, and his people had not yet arrived.

Nick gave them each a sharp glance.

For a moment it was in his mind to accost one of them, but he thought better of it. There was really no reason why he should think they were following him.

He started away at once along the country road leading back toward the hills, and he had walked perhaps a half-mile when the man who had appeared to be waiting for some one was driven rapidly past him in a buggy; but there was another man on the seat with him. It looked legitimate enough, and not at all as if he were one of the many shadows whom Nick believed were dogging his steps.

He plodded onward, and thought no more about it, save to assure himself that the man who had been driving the horse was neither of the two others he had seen at the station.

But before he had gone half a mile farther, an automobile came rapidly up behind him and went past at a flying pace. He only caught a fleeting glimpse of the occupants of the car, but it was enough to assure him that it contained, with others, the two men whom he had seen together at the station.

But they did not even glance in his direction, and Nick laughed aloud at himself.

"I'm getting to be suspicious of everybody I see," he mused. "Still, if that shadow is having me watched today, that is just about what they would do if they could find the buggy and the automobile in time."

He passed a point where he thought the conditions were just about right, as he wanted them. It was at a place where the road passed through a wood.

He did not stop, however, but passed on for a considerable distance.

Then he abruptly turned around and retraced his steps until he was in the middle of the wood again, and there he leaped the fence and started off through the forest.

He was fairly familiar with the country where he was, and he knew that presently he would come to another clearing, and that beyond that was still another strip of woods, while still beyond that was a road that would take him, if he followed it, to Mamaroneck.

Before he left the woods and went out into the clearing, he waited a little while, listening carefully, and keeping his eyes about him to discover any evidence that he was followed and spied upon.

But there was nowhere the slightest evidence of it, and so he presently withdrew into a thicker part of the wood and opened his satchel.

His first act was to dump the contents of the satchel on the ground, and then to select from among them a coat and hat and pair of trousers that he wanted.

The trousers he pulled on over those he already wore; the coat he buttoned closely around him; the hat, a slouch one, totally unlike that he had been wearing, he pulled down over his eyes. Then he adjusted a false beard, loosened some catches that were a part of the mechanism of the satchel, pulled the leather flaps down that were thus released, and so transformed it from a smart-looking russet to a shabby, worn black bag.

As it was of the Gladstone pattern, the shape accorded very well with the three changes it was capable of producing.

Next he cut a stick from the wood, and then, with one more glance around him, and having replaced the things in the bag that he was not using, he struck out boldly across the clearing toward the other piece of woods.

If any one was following him now they managed to keep very much out of the way, for he saw nobody at all, and he believed that he entered the other wood unobserved.

But there was still one more change that he wished to

make as soon as he found the right place to do it; and presently he came to the very spot.

It was at the top of quite a perceptible rise of ground directly in the middle of the wood, where the trees were sparse save at the very top of the knoll; there they were dense.

He climbed to the top of the knoll and discovered that he could see a long distance among the trees in every direction, and, satisfied that he was alone, he withdrew into the denser part of the thicket, and there set about adorning himself as Joshua Juniper.

To do this he first divested himself of all his outer clothing. Then, having set up a small mirror on a stump that was handy, he opened his make-up box and began the operation of transforming his face into what he wished it to be.

A tight-fitting wig of hair that showed evidences of neglect of the barber, and which was just beginning to turn gray, was the first thing he made use of. It was hair that had originally been sandy, and showed it still.

Next a pair of fiercely shaggy eyebrows of the same color were fastened in place.

Then with the pigments from his box he gave himself a tanned, weather-beaten appearance, and did it so well that it would have required a microscope to have discovered that it was false. He managed also to put a deep wrinkle or two in his skin, and to shade his eyes so delicately that they seemed as if set much farther back in his head than they really were.

Next he affixed a bunch of red whiskers, beginning to turn gray, to his chin. These were long enough to extend downward about four inches from the point of his chin.

That done, he colored his neck and shoulders and arms and hands to match his face; and then he began to dress.

He pulled on a pair of homespun trousers made after the old-fashioned style of fall-fronts; they were considerably worn, and yet they had the appearance of being his "Sunday-go-to-meetin'" trousers, after all; and then he pulled on a pair of calfskin boots, resplendent with Bixby's Best blacking. These were run down at the heels considerably, but were the Sunday boots, nevertheless; he dropped the trousers legs over the tops of them.

Now he donned a shirt that had evidently been washed and ironed at home, and that buttoned down the front with common pearl buttons; but between the upper one and the collar he introduced a pin which was simply a plain gold cross.

The collar came next; it was of the old-fashioned turn-down variety, and a ready-made bow fastened on with an elastic—a bow of the very brightest of blues, completed that part of the attire.

The waistcoat was a double-breasted, yellow plaid that looked as if his old wife had made it for him out of one of her cast-off skirts. It was bound around the edges with brown braid, and thoroughly looked the part he intended it should.

The coat was of the long-tailed, Prince Albert variety. The material was black broadcloth, and the garment had every appearance of having been in the family for several generations, although it was still whole and in fairly excellent condition. And this coat was a marvel, if one were permitted to examine it thoroughly, for it contained pockets all over it; the skirts of it could be removed and cutaways tails substituted; in that condition it could be reversed and show another color, and it possessed many other qualities which it is not necessary to enumerate here. But it was a perfect mine of resource, if it should happen that the detective were obliged to draw upon them.

The next prize that he drew from the satchel was the hat. It was rather a broad-brimmed felt hat, such as was greatly in the fashion fifty years ago. The hat looked, too, as if it had been in use for that length of time, and had lately been brushed up for this particular occasion. It had a leather skating-strap around it for a band, and the strap gave evidence that the hat was a trifle too large for the wearer, and that he had utilized the strap in order to draw it in a "mite."

His next act was carefully to place his pistols where he liked to carry them, and he also took this occasion to adjust the two small ones in his sleeves, where they were fastened to spiral springs. This was an invention of Nick Carter's own, and was so arranged that he could by a single motion of his arm throw either pistol into his grasp, discharge it, and release it again instantly, so that it would slide back out of sight in less than a second.

He now gave his attention once more to the satchel.

First he packed into it the things he had discarded and for which he did not expect to have immediate use. And then he again manipulated numerous snaps and catches and press-snaps, and lo! in a moment the black Gladstone bag had disappeared, and in its place was a genuine representation of the old-time carpetbag, that was once in such general use.

"There, by gum!" he exclaimed. "I sorter guess, Joshua, that yewer about fixed this time."

He left his bag on the ground where it was and stepped to the edge of the trees, gazing about him carefully in every direction, listening and waiting.

There was not a sound anywhere. If a human being chanced to be near him, there certainly were no evidences of the fact.

Satisfied of this at last, he returned to the trees, picked up the carpetbag, pulled a spray of timothy from a bunch of it that was growing near the edge of the trees, and, with this thrust between his teeth, he strode out from his shelter and made straight for the road.

Not for the road by which he had entered the wood, but for that other one, which would take him to Mamaroneck.

He found it after a walk of fifteen minutes, and, having climbed the fence, he turned his face toward the town he wished to find, and walked onward as if he belonged to that locality.

It was a good three miles to where he wished to go, but he plodded on patiently, and was within the village and almost to the station when the same automobile that had passed him once before that day glided swiftly past him, and the two men whom he had seen before leaped out upon the station-platform.

Nick was near enough to hear the conversation that followed, and the burden of it was that the two men would send word within a day or two whether they had decided to purchase or not, and in the meantime they were very much obliged, etc., etc.

"If those chaps were really on my track," thought Nick, "they are clever at it; and, anyhow, they haven't spotted me now. But, after all, I don't believe they were following me."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHARPERS ON THE TRAIN.

Nick Carter was careful not to overdo his part.

He waited around a few moments, as if he did not know what to do, and then he approached a uniformed person who was stalking about the platform and asked:

"Say, mister, I git the train for New York right here, don't I?"

"Yes, sir. Twelve-forty-four; be here in five minutes."

"Thankee. I s'pose yew have tew have tickets to ride on it, don't yew? Where d'yew git 'em, mister?"

"Right inside there."

Nick turned away and entered the waiting-room. He noticed that one of the two men who had arrived in the automobile was regarding him with interest, and he felt it incumbent upon himself to play his part perfectly.

At the window of the ticket-office he pulled out a roll of bills with a rubber band around them and asked:

"How much is it, mister? I've forgotten. I came up here the other day from New York, but then I had my nephew with me, and he paid the fare, so I don't remember much about it."

"Forty-five cents," replied the ticket-agent.

"Gosh! Is it? Say—here's your money—how long does it take to git there?"

"Oh, about forty-five minutes."

"Je-rew-sa-lum the golden! A cent a minute. Well, that beats me, I swan! I'd like to hire out at that rate, by thunder! I'd git rich in about a year, wouldn't I?"

"Stand aside, please. There are others waiting for tickets."

"That's so. I forgut."

He picked up his bag, and, still chewing upon the spray of grass, strolled out again upon the platform.

The two men whom he had noticed were still standing together talking, and Nick saw that they had remained in such a position that they could watch him all the time he was in the waiting-room; but whether this was by accident or design, he had no means of telling. He did not believe it possible that with all the precautions he had taken they could suspect his identity; or, if they did suspect it, it was only suspicion at the best. It could not be certainty.

After a moment he strolled along the platform past them, and as he returned he stepped quite near them, as if by accident but really to overhear what they were talking about.

"Yes, I think it would be a good purchase," one of them was saying, as if they were still discussing a piece of property that they had gone there to inspect. "It's a good investment at that price, and I'm for it, if you'll go in. Of course, I don't care to carry it alone."

"Say, mister," said Nick, at this point, "I guess you two gents know something about that air city of New York, don't you? I'm sort uh skeered about askin' too many fool questions after I git there, but I do want to find out something, if yew'll help me."

"Certainly we will; what is it?" replied the one who had been talking.

"I wanter know what'd be a good hotel fur me tew stop at, and I thought mebby yew'd be good enough tew tell me. Yew see, it's this away: I'm goin' tew stay in the city tew days, and I wanter see the sights, if I kin."

"Then if you want to remain only two days, my friend, and wish to see real life, you should go to one of the big, first-class houses."

"Yewer right thar, mister! That's what I want, sure. But, yew see, I've found out since I left home that I don't look exactly like the other fellers around me. People stare at me as if I'd gone daffy, or suthin', and I'm sort uh afraid to go tew one uh them big places, for fear they wouldn't keep me. I don't look swell enough."

"It's the money that counts, my friend; not looks. If you have got the price, they will give you a room, all right, anywhere."

"Well, I've got the price; that is, if it ain't tew steep. How much would it cost?"

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know. That's what I'm askin' yew."

"Where are you from, sir?"

"I b'long down in the oil regions of Pennsylvania. I've got a nephew livin' up in over back yender a piece,

and I've been visitin' him; but I jest run away to-day so's I could have a couple uh days in the city afore I go back to Mirandy. Yew see, we struck ile, and now it's a runnin' outen the ground like all git out, and I won't have tew work any more, so they tell me. Where'd yew stop, if you was me? Hey?"

"I think you ought to go to the Mammoth, if you can afford it, sir."

"Then it's the Mammoth for me. It's Josh Juniper for the Mammoth, and don't yew forgit it. Say; I've heerd about that place. Hello! Here comes the train. Mebby yew'll let me git in along with you and then yew'll tell me some more."

They seemed to pay no attention to him, but he followed along, just the same, into the smoking-car, and took a seat directly behind them.

"How'll I find that air Mammoth place?" he leaned forward and asked, after the train had started.

"We are going directly there ourselves," said one of the men. "If you will stick near us we will show you the way. Where did you say you were from, in Pennsylvania?"

"I didn't say, mister. It ain't much of a place, when all's said. It's called Pokeberry. There ain't more'n half a dozen houses in the place, and this is the first time I've been so far away from it since I kin remember. When I was a little shaver, my dad took me to New York once; but, Jerusalem! I don't remember a thing about it. I guess there wasn't any Mammoth then, anyhow."

"Very likely not. And you say that you struck oil on your farm?"

"Yep. Struck it rich, tew."

"Flowing well, eh?"

"Sure pop."

"And you have sold it?"

"Yep."

"Who bought it, Mr. Juniper?"

"Say! How in thunder did yew know my name, mister?"

"Why, you mentioned it yourself a moment ago."

"Did I? Don't that beat all? Mirandy says to me just afore I came away, says she: 'Josh, yew wanter be mighty careful about spillin' that air name uh your'n around promiscuous, cos there's a lot uh slick fellers down in New York that's jest a-lookin' for hayseeds like yew are.' But it's all right with yew tew, I know. What was that yew asked me?"

"Who bought your place?"

"A man name uh Simmons. He came a-nosin' around there and wanted to buy, and so I sold out. But I kept the house an' barn and three acres uh ground. I wouldn't sell that nohow."

"It's your home, I suppose?"

"Yep."

"Did you get a good price for your property?"

"A good price? Well, afore I struck the ile I had been borin' around there for twenty years, ad I'd ha' sold out two hours afore I hit it, for five hundred dollars; but when I'd hit it, I knowed I'd got it, and I made up my mind that they'd have to pay for it; and they did."

"That's good. How much?"

"Well, that's rather a cheeky question, don't yew think? However, I ain't got no objections tew tellin' yew, as I see. I sold out for a hundred and five thousand dollars. I insisted on the extra five because I wanted it tew spend in havin' a good time."

"And do you mean to say that you have got all that money with you?"

"All uh what money with me, mister?"

"Why, the hundred and——"

"Not by a long shot, I ain't. I ain't such a fool as I look, mebby. But I've got all I'll need."

"About a hundred dollars, I suppose; eh?"

"More'n that."

"Five hundred, then; eh?"

"More'n that, too."

"Not so much as a thousand!"

"Five uh them, lackin' a little that I've spent already."

"Aren't you afraid that somebody will rob you, Mr. Juniper?"

"What, *me?* Not by a blamed sight. They've got to get up early in the morning to do that. I'm willin' tew spend it, and spend it liberal; that's what I've got it for, and if yew tew ain't got anything better to do than to go around with an old hayseed like me to-night and show me something of the city, I'll pay the bills."

Nick saw a quiet nudge exchanged between the two men.

He had known, of course, for several minutes that he had unwittingly hit upon a pair of sharpers who were willing to relieve him of his money if they could do it. He was wise to that the moment they began to quiz him about the oil-wells; and for the sake of the game he was to play that night at the Mammoth he had no objections to appearing to be their victim, for a time at least.

He was assured, now, that they had nothing to do with the shadow business; and yet he was not so positive of it, either, when he stopped to think. However, he could await developments for that part of the game.

"We will think about it, Mr. Juniper," the talkative man replied, after a moment; and then as the two began to talk together, Nick leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes—or appeared to do so. In reality, he was watching those two men all the time.

He was thinking: "When I got off at the station at Harrisons, these two men got off, also. There was a third one who seemed to have no connection with them but since I am satisfied that I was at least followed a

far as that station, it stands to reason that *one* of those three men, at least, was my shadow. It is equally possible that all three of them were.

"Now, if they were, they must have known at once that they could not trail me along those country roads without my spotting them, and since they are wise at their game, they guessed that I had gone out there on purpose to get next to them, if they dared to follow.

"If I suppose, for the sake of argument, that all three of them were in the game, then they did trail me as far as the place where I disappeared into the woods. But they lost me there, and I have made two changes since that time.

"If they were my shadows, and if they did give me up after I disappeared in the woods, it is possible that they—that is, these two—suspected me when I appeared at the Mamaroneck station.

"But if they did, I have partly thrown them off the track again; and if I appear now to fail in with their plans, I will have them away off their trolley, and, in that way, by losing a few dollars, I will be able to find out something about them. I think it is worthy trying, anyhow."

He waited a few minutes longer, and then he leaned forward again.

"Say, mister," he said. "Is it a go?"

"We think so; we think so, Mr. Juniper; but we wih have to wait until we get to the hotel before we give you a definite answer. We are expecting to meet some gentlemen there, and if they should happen to be willing to excuse us for the evening, we'll be glad to pilot you around."

"Bully for you!" replied Nick. "I'll stick by yew til yew find out."

CHAPTER VII.

WAS THE TALL, DARK MAN THE SHADOW?

To say that Nick Carter in his disguise as Joshua Juniper was grotesque is putting it mildly, and yet he was not more so than the occasion warranted.

He acted his part so thoroughly that he presented to those who noticed a mixture of shrewdness and simplicity that was extremely puzzling.

It was part of the character he played to let these two men, whom he thought he had sized up so perfectly, see that he did not trust them entirely; that he had his doubts concerning them, and yet depended sufficiently upon his own sagacity to protect him.

It was amusing the manner in which all eyes turned toward Nick when he entered the great hostelry and marched with pride and conscious power—of the money he had in his pocket, evidently—to the desk.

He seized upon the pen that was handed to him, as if it were an ax with which he was expected to carve a cord of wood, and he wrote "Joshua Juniper, Pokeberry, Pa.," on the register in a crabbed hand that looked as if he had leaned his whole weight on the pen while he was inscribing it. When the clerk asked him what sort of a room he desired, he replied:

"Well, I dunno. How much does it cost?"

"Anywhere from two and a half to two hundred and a half a day," he was assured; and there was a twinkle in the eye of the clerk when he said it.

"Say, mister," said Nick, "I expect yewer joshin' me, now: but my name's Josh, so it don't cut much timber in my section. I ain't no Rockyfeller; I'm jest a common oil-feller. I've heerd tell a lot about rooms with baths, and if you've got one uh them things laying around loose, I guess I'll take it—if it don't cost tew much."

"I can give you a room and bath for five dollars a day, and up."

"Well, I don't want the 'and up,' mister. I'll stand for the five, all right. I'm goin' tew stay tew days, so if it's all the same to yew I'll pay now, in advance, so's I won't have to bother. Here yew be, mister," and again the elastic-bound roll was in evidence.

He could see Conner seated in a chair along the corridor, watching him with evident admiration, and he knew that Conner approved of the disguise and the manner in which he was carrying out the part.

Nick would have given considerable for an opportunity to say a few words to Conner, right then and there, but there was none; and presently he followed the hall-boy to the elevator; and he smiled when he saw the latter wink at his companions when he seized upon the dingy-looking carpetbag to carry it to the elevator.

As Nick was about to follow the boy, he heard his assumed name called, and, turning, he discovered the talkative one of the two men who had come down in the train with him; he saw the other one, also, in earnest conversation with a tall, dark man.

"I suppose you will be down again presently, Mr. Juniper?" the fellow said; and Nick replied:

"Well, I dunno. I ain't learned the ropes yet, and I dunno how long it takes a feller to get into one uh them baths. I suppose I've got to do it afore I come down, ain't I?"

"Oh, no," laughed the man. "You are not expected to get into the tub until it is time to retire for the night."

"That so? Well, I'll be down in a jiffy, then. Say!"

"Well?"

"You ain't told me how to call yew yet. Yew've got my name slicker'n grease. What's your'n, mister?"

"My name is John Seabright; my friend's name is William Mosely."

"Are yew stayin' here to this hotel, tew?"

"Oh, no; we live in the city, you know."

"Who's that feller that Bill is talking tew? Hey?"

"That who is talking to? Oh! Mr. Mosely, you mean?"

"Yep. Didn't you say his name was Bill?"

"Sure. Oh, that's a gentleman with whom we had some business to transact."

"Is, hey? Well, if he's a friend uh your'n, mebby he'd like to trot along in this heat with us to-night. Yew kin ask him, if yew want tew, f'r all uh me. So-long."

He had prolonged the conversation purposely in order that Conner would catch onto the fact that he wanted them watched; but now he turned and followed the boy to the room that had been assigned to him.

"Say, sonny," he said, when the latter was waiting to see if the countryman knew enough to give him a tip, "I've heerd tell that it's the thing to dew to give a boy like yew a little cash for lookin' pleasant and doin' nothin' 'cept grin. I'm going tew give yew a half a dollar, but I want tew talk tew yew a leetle first. How's that?"

"That's all right, Mr. Juniper."

"Well, I swan! Yew know my name, tew, don't you? Say!"

"Yes, sir."

"I want tew ask yew about them fellers yew seen me talking tew down-stairs. Yew see, I'm a leetle bit green over in this township, and mebby yew kin give me an idee or tew. Who be they?"

"I don't know them, sir, except that I've seen them hanging around the hotel a good deal, and I don't believe they're any good. You see, sir, when men like they are taken up with a gentleman who is fresh from the country and don't know the ropes, they're mighty apt to be looking for something that doesn't belong to them. I'm not saying anything against them, but I'd be very careful about new acquaintances while I was in the city, if I were you."

"Thank yew. That's good advice, sonny. Mebby somebody around the hotel does know something about them, and mebby you could find out what it is. If you could, and would bring the information back to me in a few minutes, while I'm a-washin' my face an' hands, I'd have another one uh them fifty-cent pieces for yew when yew got back."

"I'll try, sir; I'll see what I can do. I'll ask the house detective."

"All right; and, say! Did yew see that big, tall, black-lookin' feller what was gassin' with the other one?"

"Oh, yes. I know him. He lives here in the hotel."

"Yew don't say so! Who may he be, sonny?"

"He is Mr. Anthony Prime."

"What does he dew?"

"Eh? Oh, I don't know, sir. He has some sort of business where he has a good many working for him, I think. He has been here about three weeks, and he rarely goes out of the house. But he has an awful lot of people coming to see him. His room is right here on this floor, too, but at the other end of the building."

"Well, yew go and find out about them tew men for me, sonny. I'll be washed up by the time yew git back."

When the detective was alone, he crossed over to the window and stood looking out of it, thinking deeply.

"I wonder if they have caught onto my disguise, and if they *do* suspect who I am?" he asked himself; "and I wonder what sort of an outfit it is that I am up against, anyway? I am satisfied that those two men belong to the outfit that is shadowing me, and I am also satisfied that they are professional crooks instead of professional 'shadows.' It is my own belief that up to the moment when that black-browed fellow saw me I had the others fooled to a standstill; but I have now the uneasy feeling that he tumbled to me the minute he saw me, and, if I am right, it follows that *he is the king-pin of this plot*, whatever it is."

He was interrupted at that moment by a tap at the door, and, opening it, he admitted the boy with whom he had talked—and also a tall, solemn-looking personage in whom he instantly recognized the house detective.

This man stepped inside the room and closed the door after him; then he said:

"This boy told me that you were asking some questions about the two men with whom you came to the hotel, Mr. Juniper, and I thought it would be a good idea if I came up here to see you myself. I am glad that you were wise enough to ask such questions, for strangers, and particularly strangers from the country who are not used to city ways, are likely to be badly taken in by such men as they are."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Nick, with well-simulated surprise. "Yew don't mean to tell me that them fellers is *crooks*, dew yew?"

"Well, that is rather a strong term, seeing that I really know nothing about them; but I wouldn't trust them too far, if I were you. They have been hanging around the place now for two or three weeks, and while

there isn't a thing against them that I know of, I watch them all the time, and I'm frank to say that I don't like their style. That is why I thought it best to return here with the boy and tell you about it myself."

"That's mighty gol-darned good uh you, mister, and I appreciate it, tew," said Nick; and he brought out the roll again and unwrapped a five-dollar bill from the surface of it. "I'm a livin' like a prince for a few days, mister, and if yew'll take this as a sort uh keepsake from Josh Juniper, I'll appreciate that, tew. I wish yew'd tell me some more about them, for I'm goin' out with them this evening, and I'd like to be posted."

"I think it would be better if you did not go with them at all, sir."

"Huh! I guess that Josh kin take care of himself—'specially after what you've said."

"Of course, Mr. Juniper, you are your own master, and you must do as you please; but I do not like that outfit at all. That's frank."

"Betcher life it is. Why don't yew?"

"There is a bunch of them that works for the tall, dark man you saw one of them talking with. I noticed when they were talking together that the tall man frequently glanced in your direction when you were not looking. I don't know what their business is, only that it is something mysterious. The hotel has been on the point of asking for his room two or three times, but he hasn't really done anything to give them an excuse to do so."

"What kind of a bunch is it that hangs around him, mister? And how many of them are in it?" asked Nick.

"I can tell you all I know about them in a few words, Mr. Juniper. The tall man came here about three weeks ago. He engaged a suite of rooms, and——"

"What's that? What's a sweet ur rooms, mister?"

"He engaged four rooms and had one of them arranged for an office; had a desk put into it, and said at the office that he would have to have a number of gentlemen and occasionally a lady or two, all of whom were acting as his agents, call upon him there. He asked if there were any objections, and he got the rooms. Then he hired a direct connection with his room, over the telephone, so that he doesn't have to bother with the exchange down-stairs, and his telephone is going about all the time, and there is a steady stream of his men and women going and coming all day long, and sometimes late in the evening."

"I should think that yew'd follow some uh them and find out where they go tew?"

"We have; they don't go anywhere. They appear to just walk around a little and then go back to the hotel. It is all very strange, and we don't understand it, and that is why I believed it best to warn you."

"Well, it's mighty good uh yew, as I said afore. This kid here says that the black feller has his rooms on this floor, tew."

"Yes; but at the other end of the building and around the turn from here. It is 1166."

"Well, I guess old Josh ain't afraid uh them; but if you see anything more and want tew tell me about it, I'll appreciate it. And, say! Gosh! I hope they didn't any uh them see yew comin' tew my room, did they?"

"No; I took care of that, Mr. Juniper."

"Well, it's darned good uh yew!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE EVIDENCE OF A CONSPIRACY.

Nick Carter seated himself, to smoke and think after the hotel detective left him, but he was almost immediately interrupted by a rap at his door, and a note was handed in to him. He recognized Conner's handwriting on the envelope, and detained the boy while he read what it had to say. It was as follows:

"I think you have fooled the bunch, but I also believe that they suspect you. I trailed you to the station when you went to the country this morning, and I am satisfied that I got next to two of the men who were following you. One of them is the same with whom you were talking before you went up in the elevator; the other was a chap with a black mustache. I haven't seen him since, and I suspect that he is still somewhere in the country, looking for you."

"That was the chap who rode in the buggy," mused Nick; then he continued the reading:

"I am convinced that this is the headquarters of the push, and that the tall, dark chap with whom one of your new acquaintances was talking is the main guy of the outfit. At least, it looks that way to me. I have made some inquiries about him, and find that he is a sort of mystery in the house. He seems to be loaded to the muzzle with money, and is willing to spend it, so they don't like to send him away; but they are keeping tabs on him, all the same.

"One thing is quite certain, and that is that you made them lose you to-day, unless they are quite positive that you and Joshua Juniper are one and the same; and I don't think they more than suspect that it *may* be so. I don't believe they quite think it *is* so.

"The dark chap's name is Anthony Prime—at least, that is the name he is traveling under while he is here. He occupies a suite of four rooms on your floor—1166. I have just signed the register and taken the suite adjoining it, and which can be made a part of it; that is, the two suites can be thrown into one, which means that there are connecting doors. I took it in the name of Antoine Bougere. I am enclosing the key in this envelope, so that if you have the opportunity you can make use of the room. The manager of the hotel understands the situation, so you will be all right at your end of it. I don't know whether you can make use of it or not, but it is perhaps worth trying.

"If you go out to-night, as I think you intend to do, for I have discovered that they are talking about you, I will not be far away at any stage of the game. If I have any further communications to make, they will be addressed to, and will go into the box of, Antoine Bougere. You will know how to get them, CON."

Nick nodded to the boy that there was no answer, and when he had gone, touched a match to the letter and burned it in the grate.

Then, after a moment, he went out, and began to wander along the hall toward the other end of the building, mooning around as a countryman who had never been in such a place might be expected to do.

By a strange chance he arrived in front of 1166 at the very moment that Prime stepped from the elevator, a short distance away, and approached the door of his own rooms.

He saw the countryman at once, and gave him a piercing glance. Then he smiled, and asked:

"Can I do anything to assist you, sir? You look as if you had lost your way."

"Well, I ain't exactly lost it. I guess I was just moonin' around, snoopin', tew see what there is tew see. My name's Juniper; what's your'n?"

"Prime. This is my room here. Will you step in for a moment?"

"Thankee, no; I ain't got any call tew dew that; but I see you talkin' with some friends uh mine down-stairs."

"Indeed! Are those gentlemen friends of yours, then?"

"Well, not exactly. Say! I will jest peek into your room tew see if it's as fine as mine. Whew! By jimineddy! It's finer'n silk, ain't it? Mine ain't a patch on it. Yew must be richer'n I am, to have a room like this."

"Will you sit down? My friends tell me that you have invited me to accompany you to some places of amusement to-night."

"Sure. I see 'em talkin' tew yew, and I told 'em to bring yew along, if they wanted tew. Air yew goin'?"

"No, thank you; but it will be impossible."

"Say! This is a regular office, ain't it? Yew must have a lot uh business to attend, tew have a place like this tew do it in."

"I do have considerable business. To-day it happens to be very quiet, however. I——"

There was a sharp tap upon the door, given in a peculiar manner which Nick knew at once to be a signal; and, following the tap, there walked in upon them the man who had ridden past Nick in the buggy when he was walking along the road in the country after leaving the station at Harrisons.

"I guess I'll be going," said Nick, rising. "This is one uh yewer business men, I s'pose. So-long, mister;" and he went out, perceiving, with a smile, that his host did nothing to detain him.

"That settles it," he mused to himself as he waited for the elevator. "I am positive now that Anthony Prime is the man who is directing this shadow business against me. But *why?* I wonder why? What is he trying to accomplish? And who is he? I haven't the slightest recollection of that face, or of the man, and I know if I had ever seen him before I would remember something about him. What is his game, anyhow?"

He descended in the elevator and walked around to the office desk, where again he encountered Mr. John Seabright.

"I was waiting for you," said the latter. "I suppose you decided to take that bath, after all, didn't you?"

"No; I've been settin' around doin' nothin'. It's all rather strange tew me. Say!"

"Well?"

"Do they have anything to eat in this blamed place? I'm hungrier than all git out!"

"Sure. Come along with me; and while we are eating you shall tell me where you would like to go to-night."

"Gosh! I dunno. Anywhere at all."

"You would like to see the sights, I suppose?"

"You bet!"

"Well, what do you call the sights? What is your idea of a good time, when you are in the city in this way? A theater? A gambling-house? The ladies? A hack to ride around in, or what would suit you?"

"Well, they all sound sorter good, mister. Supposin' we take 'em all in; what dew yew say tew that?"

"It will be rather a big contract. I suggest that we go to a theater first, and then see some of the sights afterward."

"That's all right."

"Do you know how to play cards?"

"Some. I play seven-up, and kerosino, an' high-five; but, gosh! I kin dew that tew home. I say, who is that dark feller who says his name is Prime? I jest met him up-stairs. He invited me to see his rooms, and, gee! but they're fine. Is he a friend of your'n?"

"He is my boss."

"Your boss? Do you mean that you work for him?"

"Yes."

"What doin'?"

"Speculating. He is a money-maker, that man. He is very rich, and his income is several thousand dollars a day."

"Git out! Is it? How does he make his money, Jack?"

The man started a little when Nick uttered his name in that familiar manner; but he smiled, remembering that he had told the countryman his name.

"Why, he makes it in the easiest way possible. He sees a good thing, and he puts in a few thousand dollars, waits a day or two, and takes out twice as much."

"That's like rollin' off'n a log, ain't it?"

"Quite."

"I wish I knew how tew dew that."

"He could show you—— Or I could."

"Git out! Could you? Say! Will you?"

"Oh, I don't know about that. If I gave away all I know to everybody I meet, there wouldn't be anything left for me, would there?"

"I s'pose not. Say! Is Bill goin' with us to-night?"

"Eh? Who? Oh, yes; of course. By the way, tell me how long a time you think you will stay here in town with us."

"I have paid for tew days in advance, and I guess that's about my limit, Jack. I sort uh think that I'll be lightin' out uh here by the day after to-morrow."

"But you will remain until then?"

"Yes."

"And I suppose if you saw a real good thing and could make a lot more money, you'd feel like sending for some more to go into it, wouldn't you?"

"Well—if I was dead sure—I might."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. We will go to the theater to-night, and after that we will go to a place I know where the money is dead easy. I'll put you up against the game, and show you how to win. Then, to-morrow, and again to-morrow evening, we will sail into them for fair, with a few thousand dollars. What do you say to that arrangement?"

"It sounds good, Jack."

"It is good. I know what I am talking about."

"Say! Is it some uh Prime's business?"

"I get all my tips from him; yes."

They were seated at a table in the café at this time, busily engaged in eating the luncheon that had been served to them, although it was a luncheon that took the form of a dinner when quantity was considered. It was already half-past four in the afternoon, and Seabright had jocularly announced that they would make the meal do for luncheon and dinner both, and that they would have something more to eat about midnight.

Just at the moment they had finished, a boy came through the room calling out:

"Mr. Sea-*Bright!* Mr. *Seee*-bright!"

"Here, boy!" called Nick's companion; and the next moment he had torn open a hotel envelope and was busily scanning its contents. Then he raised his eyes and said:

"I will have to ask you to excuse me for a moment. Will you wait here, or where shall I find you?"

"Oh, I'll be around here somewheres," said Nick.

But the instant that Seabright disappeared in the direction of the elevator, Nick started to his feet and hurried away, also.

He went directly to the elevator and ascended to the tenth floor in it, and paused for a moment, wondering if it would be well to take the time to make some alterations in his disguise for what he wished to do.

But he decided that there was not time for that; and, accordingly, he turned along the hall in the direction of Anthony Prime's room, apparently wandering along aim-

lessly, so in case he were seen, nothing would be thought of it.

But the hallway was deserted when he arrived opposite the door of the room that had been engaged for Antoine Bougere, and with sudden alacrity he put the key in the lock, turned it, and passed inside the room.

"Now," he mused, "if I can manage to hear what is going on in that next apartment, I will be made a whole lot wiser that I am at present."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PLOTTERS AT WORK.

It has already been said that the suite into which the detective now penetrated was really a part of the one occupied by Anthony Prime; that the two could readily be thrown together so as to make one, and that there were connecting doors.

Connecting doors in hotels are usually kept locked on both sides, unless the rooms are thrown together; and Nick Carter knew this perfectly well; but he had an idea that he could manage so that he would be able to hear, if he set about it in the right way; he was soon to discover that the men who occpied the adjoining suite had very kindly arranged all that for him, without, of course, in the least intending to do so.

As soon as Nick examined the first door that he approached, it became evident to him that at some time since Prime had occupied the adjoining apartment, he had had occasion to make surreptitious use of this one, also, knowing it to be vacant. Possibly he had had some person call to see him, and had wished that another who was already there should hear what passed.

That was an explanation for it, at least. He had doubtless already arranged it so that he could thrust a person into that adjoining suite for a time being; and so not only was the door unlocked on the suite opposite Nick, it was not locked at all.

He discovered that at once, and he made the best use of it.

Of course, it added to his own immediate danger of discovery, for at any moment one of the men who were in there might enter the room where Nick was, and as he still wore his disguise as Joshua Juniper, complete betrayal would follow such an act, on the instant.

But he had to take chances, and he did not hesitate at this one; so he gently turned the knob of the door and pulled it open ever so little: sufficient to permit the sounds of conversation to come to him, but not sufficient for any one in that other room to see, unless, indeed, one of them should look directly at the door and discover that it was not tightly closed.

At once, however, he heard that which interested him, and in his interest he speedily forgot the danger he was in.

The soft tones of Anthony Prime came to him the instant he opened the door a little way, and although he spoke softly, there was a note in what he said which was threatening.

"I won't have it," he was saying, "and you know I won't. You knew that when you met the fellow up there at the station, after you had stupidly allowed Nick Carter to give you the slip. And now, instead of living up to your contract with me, you are at your own games. You think because there are a few thousand dollars in sight, that you can risk everything that I have toiled so hard to create, in order to get your claws on it. Do you by any chance remember the oath you took to me, Jack?"

"Sure I remember it," was the surly reply. "But I'm no slave, even if I did take it. This is easy money; dead easy, and I don't see why I should let it escape. You are off your nut, Prime, when you think that hayseed is anything else than what he pretends to be. I tell you he is the real article, dyed in the wool. He has got almost five thousand dollars in his clothes, and he is willing to send for more. I don't see why we shouldn't have it."

"I have told you why: because it is against my orders. If this man is *not* what he happens to appear, you are risking all our plans by what you would do to-night, and you are by no means certain that he is not Nick Carter himself. If he *is* what he appears to be, you are even then neglecting the work that you agreed to do."

"Neglecting the work? What is there to do? Carter has lost us; or, rather, we have lost him. The others are all on the watch at every place where he is likely to show up, and they are keeping tabs on that fellow Conner. What is there for Bill and me to do?"

"Obey orders."

"Oh, hang the orders!"

"Jack, do you see that door? It leads into the hall. You get upon your feet and walk out of it, and you make yourself scarce around this hotel as soon as your feet will let you. If you don't, you'll get what's coming to you. Go!"

"Am I to understand that I am fired, Prime?"

"You are."

"Isn't it rather dangerous to fire me just at this moment? I might turn on you."

There was an instant of silence, and then the voice of Jack was raised somewhat, as he called out affrightedly:

"Don't shoot! For Heaven's sake, don't shoot me, Prime."

"I would shoot you this instant if it were not for the noise. I'll risk even that, if you try me too far. Now, go, or I will take chances and kill you now."

There was the sound of footsteps crossing the floor. Then the outer door opened, and then the man evidently turned and called back savagely:

"I'll find a way to get even with you for this, curse you!" and the door slammed.

"Selim," said the soft voice of Prime, the instant the door was closed, "you know what to do. Go after him. Get back as soon as you can, but do it—and do it thoroughly;" and another soft voice, one that was even more so than Prime's, made answer:

"It won't take long. I'll hurry."

Then the outer door opened and closed softly, and there were a few moments of silence in the adjoining room.

Nick had about made up his mind that Prime was now alone, when he heard him speak, addressing some person who had remained with him.

"I have always been sorry that I took Jack into this thing with us," he said; "but he made such extravagant promises of obedience and he was so anxious to get out of prison, that I took pity on him. I have only myself to blame, for I knew what he was."

"I wish you would explain one thing to me, Prime," said another voice that Nick had not heard before.

"Well, what is it?"

"What is the use of all this beating about the bush in getting rid of Carter? Why not let Selim finish him up at once and have it over with? Here you are, spending a lot of good money in what appears to me to be a bit of utter foolishness. What good does it do to keep him shadowed day after day, if you don't do anything about the object of it?"

"My dear Potter," drawled the other, in reply, "you are the best and most expert engraver in the world, but there your talents cease. You don't know the first rudiments of the game we are playing."

"Possibly I do not. Perhaps you will be good enough to enlighten me, Prime."

"We are playing a game of millions; not one or two or three of them—but of many millions, are we not?"

"Yes."

"And it was agreed between us, when this affair was undertaken, that we should thoroughly clear the tracks to success, before we started the grand coup, which is to bring us those millions; wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"You agreed to leave all those arrangements to me, didn't you?"

"I did; but I did not suppose——"

"Wait a moment. When we entered into this arrangement and saw ahead of us all those millions, was it not the united opinion that the only hope of ultimate and complete success lay in our being able to get Nick Carter entirely out of the way, for good and all?"

"Yes."

"And wasn't it understood that it should be done in such a way that suspicion should never fall upon us at all?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you may think that a man can stand concealed in some doorway and shoot down another man without running any risk; and so he could, if that other man were just an ordinary man. You may suppose that Selim, engaged in the errand that has taken him out now, can shoot his deadly dart into Bill's back, and get away without being caught, and with no chance that he ever will be caught. So he can. Why? Because it is Bill Seabright that he has gone out to kill. But if it were Nick Carter that he had gone after, it would be quite a different matter. If Bill were Nick Carter, and Selim followed *him* out and shot his dart into the detective, there would be no rest for the weary from that moment until Selim was discovered; and that he would ultimately be discovered would be just as certain as that you are seated in that chair. And if he was discovered, he would give us all away—he would be *made* to do so. I know."

"Go on. I don't see how you hope to do it, then, without that risk of discovery."

"I hope and intend to have it done, when all the evidence and all the appearances will either point toward

some one who is not associated with us, as the guilty party, or when the thing will have the appearance of being so palpably an accident that it will never occur to any one to question it.

"If Nick Carter were murdered now, in cold blood, and it was known that it was a deliberate murder, every detective in the country would be on our trail inside of three hours. There are his two assistants; there is the man down-stairs—Conner, is his name—there is every man connected with the central office; there is practically the whole United States Secret Service, and there are hundreds of others who would never in a thousand years cease to hunt us, and sooner or later they would find us. And then, what would be the use of all those millions? None at all."

"But what *do* you propose to do?"

"I propose to go on in the way I am going now before we float those bonds and bills and stock certificates that you have so ably prepared for us. If we are too precipitate, it will be fatal. If we let Nick Carter live, he will some day find us—and he is the only man in the world who can do it, the way we have covered and will have covered our tracks. Therefore, he must die.

"*But,* if he dies too soon, and not in exactly the right way, we will be worse off than though we had not killed him, for we will have his murder to clear ourselves of, as well as the other affair."

"And on the other hand?"

"On the other hand, if we put him out of the way, in the *right* way, we will have disposed of the only man we are afraid of, and we will get away with the goods, and do it so completely that we can live the rest of our days as millionaires, respected by all around us, and be assured in our own minds that we will die of old age peacefully in our beds, without the least chance that your counterfeiting work will ever be traced home to us."

"Will you tell me how you do propose finally to get rid of him, then?"

"I will tell you this much: I propose to sacrifice Carlina. Now, if you can read that riddle, you will realize that I know what I am talking about."

"Sacrifice—Carlina! I don't in the least understand."

"You will when the time comes. Somebody has got to be sacrificed; somebody has got to be found guilty, and executed for the murder, after it is committed. You don't care to be that person; neither do I. Therefore it must be Carlina, and if Bill and Jack and Tom had not lost him just at the moment they did, it would have been pulled off to-night."

"But man, she will tell all she knows!"

"She can tell all she knows, and welcome. It cannot hurt us. Believe me, I have covered my tracks thoroughly. I have done all this shadow business, supposedly for Carlina's vengeance. Everything is prepared. Leave the rest of it to me. Then—*millions!* Ah! Selim; you have returned quickly. What success?"

"Your friend fell down in the street and hurt himself, so that he died almost instantly," was the soft reply; and the listening detective shuddered in spite of himself.

CHAPTER X.

THE PLOT OF A HUMAN DEVIL.

Nick Carter felt that he had a duty to do at once, and he withdrew from his place near the door, softly closing it as he did so.

Then he stepped quickly to the outer door, and, after peering into the corridor, stepped outside and made his way rapidly to his own rooms. There he used the telephone to the office and requested that Mr. Conroy Conner be found at once and sent to his room.

"Call out the name through the corridors, and get him here as quickly as possible," he said; and the result was that Conner appeared, much startled by the summons, in a very few minutes.

"I am onto the whole game now, Con," he said rapidly. "This disguise is of no further use to me"—he was rapidly discarding it—"and I will work for the balance of the time as plain Nick Carter. I want them to know where I am now.

"But, Con, I haven't got time to go into explanations with you now. A murder has just been committed outside the hotel in the street——"

"You mean that one of your recent acquaintances just dropped dead out there, don't you?"

"Yes: but he was killed. The man who killed him is now in the room with Prime. He is a Syrian, I think, although I have not seen him. You will find that he shot some kind of a poisoned dart into the body of his victim. I want you to station a man out there in the hall, near Prime's door, and get Selim when he comes out. Take him quietly if you can, but get him away as

quickly as possible. Take him to headquarters. That is the best place. Will you look after it?"

"Yes."

"Don't leave the hotel yourself. Send your prisoner to headquarters and wait for me. Go to the desk downstairs, and tell them that Joshua Juniper is Nick Carter. And now I must get back. I ought to have remained there and listened all this time, but it seemed necessary that I should get that Selim out of the way, and also that he should be speedily nabbed for what he has done."

"I'll get him. Leave it to me."

While Nick was talking he had washed the pigments and stain from his face and hands, and had restored himself to Nick Carter's and now he closed the door, and, with a nod to Conner, hastened back to the room from which he had listened to Prime's revelations.

Voices were still murmuring in the adjoining room when he again put himself in a position to hear, and Prime was talking. It was evident, too, that Nick had not missed much. Selim had used the time in describing the murderous assault he had just enacted.

"When we get on the detective's track again, and we should do it before noon to-morrow, in some way, he will be allowed to discover who is shadowing him. When he finds that out, he will naturally take the initiative. Now, if I know anything about Nick Carter at all, and I think I do, he will regard the shadow merely as a tool, and will use all his skill, in his turn, to shadow the shadow, for he will wish to know who his principal is. That is what will lead him into the trap I will have set for him."

"How do you mean?" asked the voice of the man whom Prime had before addressed as Potter.

"I mean that in this particular instance I will employ a man to do the shadowing business who does not know anything about us. He will be told to make his report to Carlina, and before that time I will have communicated with Carlina in such a way that she will be prepared to meet Nick Carter face to face when he enters the room to find out who it is that has been having him watched."

"Do you mean that Carlina will be thoroughly posted?"

"Am I suddenly become a fool? No; I mean nothing of the kind; but she will suppose that she is so, and, supposing it, will act accordingly."

"Then what? What happens next?"

Prime seemed to hesitate before replying: then Nick heard him change his tone and address the Syrian.

"Selim," he said, "go now and interview each of the men who are watching the approaches to Nick Carter's house. Ascertain if he has returned, because if he has not—well, I am inclined to think that we may conclude that this countryman in the hotel is no other than the detective himself, in disguise; and if he is, he is also much too near to us for comfort. Go now, Selim."

The door opened and closed softly, and Nick knew that the Syrian had at last gone out to fall into the clutches of Conner, who was awaiting him.

"Now go ahead," said Potter. "What is to happen next?"

"This, Potter: I have one of Selim's pretty little six-inch blow-pipes. I have also several of the darts that he uses for stupefying, when he does not wish to kill outright. I shall be concealed in a convenient place at Carlina's house, where I can both see and overhear all that takes place after Nick Carter enters; and from where I can also strike when the time comes. I shall take you there with me, for I wish you to be as deeply into this as I am; there will then never be an incentive for you to betray me.

"When I think that the scene has progressed far enough; when it begins to look as if Carlina might reveal too much, if left to herself any longer, I shall make use of two of the stupefying darts. The first one will strike Nick Carter, and, while Carlina is gazing at him in surprise to see him collapse so suddenly in front of her, she will get the benefit of the other one."

"What! Carlina, also?"

"They are only stupefying, Potter. In half an hour she will awaken, and when she does wake, she will find that Nick Carter is lying dead on the floor beside her, that he has been stabbed to the heart, and that the weapon employed in inflicting the wound is her own small, jeweled dagger that was given to her by Medea Carr, the actress. There will be blood upon Carlina's hand and wrist, and a drop or two spattered upon her face; there will be blood on her gown, quite naturally; and, while she is gazing in horror at the scene before her, the door will be burst open, policemen will enter the room, and Carlina will be arrested for the murder of the man on the floor."

"Great Heaven, what a plot, Prime!"

"Beautiful, isn't it?"

"But what is to hinder Carlina from making a clean breast of the whole thing? What is to prevent her from giving you away—and me, too, for that matter?"

"In the first place, Potter, she doesn't know you at all. She has never seen you or heard of you by the name of Potter. She knows nothing at all about you. In the second place, she knows almost as little about me as she does about you. She has never heard the name of Prime associated with me; she has never seen me save when I have worn that hideous scar on my face, which is my disguise as a crook, and which a microscope would not discover to be artificial; she has never seen me when I was not lame, and when the back of my left hand was not scarred as badly as my face. Even if she should choose to tell about me—which she will not do—I could not be found, and Anthony Prime would never be confounded with the man she described."

"Why shouldn't she tell of you in your other character?"

"Because to do so would only be to betray herself into just as bad a hole as this one will be. There is another killing on record. She took no part in it, but if it were known that she was the associate of Scar-face Horton, she would be believed guilty on the spot.

"But, Potter, I know the woman, and, knowing her, I am perfectly satisfied as to how she will act. She will shut her mouth like a clam, and refuse utterly to talk. When she sees that everything is against her, when she understands that the whole thing was cooked up purposely to make her suffer for the crime, and when she realizes, as she will, that I did it, she will take her medicine calmly and quietly, with never a word, and I should not be surprised if she went so far as to confess to the officers that she committed the deed, and that she alone is guilty."

"Why? Because she loves you so?"

"No; because she hates me, notwithstanding the fact that I fascinate her. She will welcome the death that will come to her, because in it she will see a way out of all her troubles—and she will never peach. I know her."

"And you think this plan will work?"

"I know it will work."

"Now, in order to make me understand still better, will you tell me who Carlina really is, Prime?"

"Yes. I have no objections, now that it is about over."

"I have heard you talk about her often, but her name is all I know. I have understood that she is your wife, but——"

"She is my wife; my legal wife. That is why she will take her medicine."

"Great Heaven! And you can condemn your own wife to such a fate as that?"

"Bah! I am tired of her. I have long been tired of her. She is still beautiful, but she is in the way. With all those millions at my command, I shall go to Italy and buy a title; I shall marry a woman of rank; I shall be a big man, even among men; and do you suppose that I want Carlina hanging to me? Not much!"

"If she sticks to you——"

"Drop it! That's enough. Carlina is one of these 'good' women. She sticks to me because she regards it as her duty. She wouldn't steal a pin or kill a fly, figuratively speaking. Such things are sins, you know. I hate such a woman. If I spared her now, she would soon discover that my millions were stolen, and, after that, she would go around looking like another Niobe, with tears flowing forever."

"How did you ever win her to be your wife, with that hideous scar on your face and hand, and the villainous look you wear at such times?"

"Ho, ho, ho! I made her believe that I was an evangelist. I was in love with her then. She wouldn't consider anything short of the marriage vow—I knew that—and so I married her. Then when she found out that I was what I am, she clung to me to reform me, and, because being my wife, she thought she had to. Women are queer things. I have tried to make her assist me at burglaries and forgeries, both; do you think she would? Not much! And now, Potter, I want to ask you a question. I have been frank with you; I want you to be equally frank with me."

"Well?"

"Where are all those bonds and plates? Where is the money and the stuff you have already printed? I think you ought to tell me that now."

"Not yet, Prime; not yet; not quite. I should be afraid, if you knew all that before we go to that house where Carlina is, to-morrow night, that you would send another dart into my back, and that Carlina would have two murders instead of one to answer for."

Nick could hear Prime chuckle. He heard him reply:

"Oh, all right. I don't know but you are wise, after all. We will have close to ten millions between us, and, of course, I would like to have it all. What! Are you going?"

"Yes. Tell me where and at what time you want me to-morrow night."

"I want you here at eight o'clock. We ought to get Carter in the toils by ten."

"And you now believe that this is the safe way to do it, and that all that shadowing was useless, do you?"

"Yes. I decided on it to-day. It is the quickest and the safest way."

"And all your men who have been doing the shadow-act for you? What of them, Prime?"

"They will not bother us very long. They will be speedily gotten rid of; and then it will be us two alone to enjoy the millions."

Nick heard the door close as Potter went out; and then he heard Anthony Prime laugh aloud and say:

"Fool! I wonder what you would say if you knew that I know already where the bonds and plates and money are? And if you knew that one of those darts *is* for you?"

CHAPTER XI.

SCAR-FACE HORTON, THE FORGER-COUNTERFEITER.

With Prime left alone in his sumptuous rooms, Nick glided noiselessly away, and was soon out in the hall and descending by the elevator to the office floor.

He regretted that it had been impossible to get a glimpse of the man Potter, but he realized how foolish it would have been to attempt it, for had Potter once suspected that there had been a man in the adjoining room listening to that conversation, all the fat would have been in the fire.

And now Nick Carter understood that he was on the track of one of the greatest forgery and counterfeit cases that had ever happened.

Here were men who by their own confession were willing to turn loose, in some definite way they had planned out, upward of ten millions of dollars' worth of bonds, certificates of stock, and counterfeit money upon which they had planned to realize at once; and they had evidently planned so well, that but for the accident of Nick Carter's being brought into the case, it might have been years before they were caught and punished.

The character of the man called Prime puzzled Nick. He could not understand why he knew nothing of such a criminal

It is true that he had heard often of Scar-face Horton, and this man Prime was he.

But Scar-face Horton was a hangdog-looking fellow, with a terrible scar on his face and on one of his hands, and with a stoop in one shoulder, and a lame leg as well.

Of course, Nick understood now that all those things were assumed; that Prime merely turned the game around and disguised himself among his crook associates, reserving to himself his own particular features and bearing.

Truly he had played his parts cleverly, to dare now to live in the open at one of the most famous of New York hotels.

When he reached the office desk he called the clerk with whom he had registered to one side, and explained to him that he was "Joshua Juniper" restored to his own proper person in Nick Carter.

"I want you to explain to the manager," he said, "and to say to him for me that I hope he will do nothing to disturb Mr. Anthony Prime's equanimity until after to-morrow night."

"Look out!" said the clerk in a low tone, without moving his lips; and, turning, Nick saw that the man known as William Mosely was approaching the desk.

He devoted a casual glance upon Nick, as if to make sure that it was he, asked some unimportant question of the clerk, and then turned away and walked straight to the elevator.

"Good!" thought the detective. "He has gone now to tell Prime that Nick Carter is here. It would be an odd thing if they should try to work that little racket of theirs on me to-night instead of waiting for another day."

He saw Conner down the corridor, and hastened to him; and then they both withdrew to two chairs removed from others, and seated themselves.

"Well," said the detective, "did you get Selim?"

"Yes. As easily as could be. He showed fight for a moment, but a rap on the side of his head satisfied him. We took him before his victim, and he displayed the most abject terror."

"I hope the arrest didn't get noised around the hotel. It might spoil everything."

"It isn't noised around anywhere. I have kept the whole thing as quiet as could be. But Prime is sure to miss him after a while, and to suspect that something has happened to him."

"We will have to take that chance. Conner, did you ever hear of Scar-face Horton?"

"Hear of him? I should say so. I wish I could find him."

"I can find him for you, Con."

"You're joking, now. He's the slickest forger and counterfeit passer in the world. There isn't another like him. The department at Washington is looking for him now, and another chap, whose real name is Vinton Potter, who is the best engraver that ever handled a tool, bar none."

"I can find him, too. They are together. But what does the department want with them?"

"Nothing in particular; only to keep tabs on them. They have been lying low so long that we think they are arranging for a grand-stand play. We want to head it off, if possible."

"The department is right. They are arranging a grand-stand play—to the tune of over ten millions."

"I'm not surprised. Wilkie won't be, either. We've been expecting it. But do you mean to say that you have caught onto what they are up to?"

"Yes."

"Run into it by accident, Nick?"

"Our friend Prime and Scar-face Horton are one and the same; the same man, Con."

"Oh, come! That can't be possible, you know."

"It is true, nevertheless. Potter has been at work several years, it would appear, at some fine work he has been doing. He has made bonds, stock certificates, and a lot of bill-plates, and he has got them all printed, ready to float when the time is ripe. All this shadow-business they have been bothering me about was merely part of a scheme to get me out of the world—off the earth, you know—so that they wouldn't have me on their track later. They did me the compliment to think that I was the only man who could catch them; they forgot you, Con."

"Well, I don't know. I think they pretty near knew what they were about. Did you find out where the plates and the other stuff is, Nick?"

"No; but we will get it to-morrow night. It can't get away from us. Say, Con, have you any idea what a cold-blooded scoundrel that Scar-face is?"

"I have heard a good deal about him. He has the reputation of not being afraid of anything, and of having said that there was a dead man for every time the law had tried to catch him. You know we have thought a hundred times that we had him dead to rights, when he would walk out of our clutches as if he had disappeared into thin air."

"That was because he removed the scars from his face and hands, took the stoop out of his shoulder, and straightened that lame leg of his, so that he could walk as well as anybody."

"You don't mean——"

"Yes, I do, too."

"By Jove! And to think we never tumbled!"

"Did you ever hear that he had a wife, Con?"

"Yes. She has been mixed up with him in a good many of his villainies. Some of the men say that she is worse than he is. She is also said to be a beautiful woman, although nobody has ever succeeded in describing her so that we could spot her. We have thought that if we could get track of her we would find him."

"Con, I have got another revelation for you. Carlina, as he calls his wife——"

"Yes. That is her name. It is the only fact we ever got about her."

"Well, she is not as bad as you have painted her. She is only his wife. He made her believe that he was a missionary, or an evangelist, when he married her. When she found out that he was a thief, she wouldn't leave him. She is one of the kind that believes the duty of a wife comes before everything else. She has thought that she could reform him; and now he has laid a plot by which he hopes to rid himself of her, and of me at the same time, and, incidentally, to murder Potter also."

Nick then went into detail, and told Conner everything that he had heard, omitting nothing.

"I thought once," he said in conclusion, "of sending below for you, and pouncing down upon them both then and there; but if I had done so, we might never have gotten our hands on the plates and bonds that the government would like very much to have; so I thought it was best to let them work out their present plans to a finish."

"You are dead right about that. The capture wouldn't amount to much without the plates, and the bonds and other things that are already printed. But how are you going to work it out to-morrow night, Nick?"

"Why, I've got to do it just as he expects me to do it."

"You mean follow that shadow to Carlina's house?"

"Yes. You see, we have no idea where that house is, and the only way in which we can find out is for me to fall into Prime's plans. You will have to find some way to follow me, and you will have to be mighty careful about it, too, for there is no doubt that they will have another trailer behind me."

"I think I can manage that part of it, all right. But, Nick, you are running a great risk in going to that house in that manner."

"Bosh! Who cares about that?"

"It might occur to Scar-face to do you up without waiting for the full working out of the plot."

"It won't. He is too fond of his plots for that."

"Anyhow, he might get one of those darts into you before we can arrive on the scene."

"They are not poisoned to kill, even if he does; but I don't think he will. Anyhow, it is a chance that I must take."

"Do you think that he really means to kill Potter?"

"Yes; he said as much as soon as Potter had gone out."

"Then he knows where Potter has concealed the plates and other things."

"He thinks he does; but it is my idea that Potter is too slick for him. He has probably changed his hiding-place for them, since Prime found out where it was."

"More than likely."

"Well, it strikes me right now that there isn't anything for us to do between now and to-morrow evening."

"Not a thing. We will let them have their heads until then."

"But suppose the disappearance of Selim gives them a scare? Suppose Prime finds out that Selim is taken in for the murder of Jack Seabright? Is it likely to frighten them out of the rest of their job? Won't he be afraid that Selim will peach on him?"

"That might be so. I'll tell you what to do. You go straight down to headquarters now, Con. Go in and see Selim, and make him write you a note to be delivered to Prime—something that will allay his suspicions. Make Selim believe that Prime betrayed him, and that, unless Prime is kept in the city for a few days under a sense of false security, he will escape altogether. You can do that. Let Selim write that he has been arrested because he was seen near the man who fell and hurt himself, and all that, but assure him that there is no proof, and that Prime need not worry."

"I'll try it. I don't know how it will work."

As they were about to leave the hotel together, Nick having already given directions about his bag that was in the Juniper room, they encountered Prime and Mosely approaching together.

The detective and Conner halted, as if by mutual consent. They were near the hotel desk, and they saw that these two men were approaching it to ask a question of one of the clerks.

Mosely stepped forward toward the desk, and asked:

"What has become of our friend Mr. Juniper? I was at his door a moment ago, but could get no answer."

The clerk turned to the key-boxes, drew out a card, examined it a moment, returned it to its place, and replied:

"He has gone to the Herald Square Theater. Return at eleven; at least, that is what the card says."

"Thank you," replied Mosely, and he moved away, accompanied by Prime.

"And you mean to tell me that that is Scar-face?" asked Conner. "I should never have guessed it in the world."

"Nor anybody else," replied the detective.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNMASKING OF SCAR-FACE HORTON.

Shortly after seven o'clock the succeeding evening, Nick Carter strolled leisurely from his house-door and turned up the avenue. He had remained indoors nearly all the day, in preparation for what he knew must occur that night; and now he was prepared for the adventure in every sense of the word.

Conner had already gone forth, completely disguised, and it was arranged between the two detectives, that Nick, as soon as he knew he was followed, would pass a certain point on Sixth Avenue, where Conner would be in waiting for him.

After that Nick was to appear to "drop" to the fact that he was followed, and was then to turn about and pursue his pursuer; and Conner was to use that opportunity to find out how best to follow Nick to the home of Carlina, where he was to be entrapped.

This program was carried out to the letter, and at half-

past eight o'clock Nick saw the man upon whom he had turned disappear into a house in Sixty-ninth Street.

A pretentious-looking house it was, too; and Nick, to carry out his part, as he might have done had he gone into the matter innocently, studied the house from the outside for a time, and then boldly ran up the steps and rang the bell.

He knew that if Prime and Potter had carried out their plans as they had been arranged, both must be already in the house, awaiting his arrival there, to complete the hellish plot that Prime had planned.

The door was opened presently by a woman whom Nick thought at once must be Carlina. She was very beautiful, although her face was the saddest that Nick had ever seen, he thought.

She bowed to him, and apologized for not sending a maid to the door, saying that she happened to be without one at the moment. Then she asked:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"I would like to see the man who just entered here," he replied; and he stepped through the door, managing to touch the latch with his thumb as he did so, and thus pressing back the catch, which would allow the door to be opened from the outside as well as in. Then he closed it behind him.

"Will you step this way?" she asked; and she took him to the back parlor and indicated a chair, where he might be seated; but Nick had his own reason for not wishing to sit in that particular chair. He remembered what Prime had said, about the station he would stand in, and he took another chair far removed from it, and facing in the other direction.

"Madam," he said, "for many days I have been followed about the city everywhere I went. To-night I traced one of those men who have been following me to this house. He came in here, and now I am here to demand to know what it all means."

"I suppose it is my husband," she replied simply.

"But why should your husband have me followed? Who is he?"

"He is Scar-face Horton, the forger and counterfeiter," she replied, as if she were reciting a lesson. "You are Nick Carter, the detective, are you not? Well, sir, he wants to get rid of you. I am perhaps sacrificing my own life in telling you this, but I could not do otherwise. Even this place is a trap for you, I fear. My husband was here not many hours ago, and he may have gone out. I don't know. I only know that I wish you had not come here, and that you would go away at once while you can."

Nick started to his feet.

He saw in that instant that the woman meant what she said; he saw also that she was not a party to the plot by which her husband was to remain hidden where he could see and hear. She had not been let into that. Evidently Horton had some place where he could conceal himself that was not known to her.

As he leaped to his feet he jumped to one side instinctively, and, as he did so, he felt the passage of something past his cheek, and he heard the impact of that same something as it struck against the wall at the opposite side of the room.

Almost at the same instant the woman uttered a sharp gasp, as if of pain, and then her knees bent under her, and she sank to the floor as unconscious as if she were dead; and then Nick heard a low laugh from beyond the partition, and he realized in that instant that, in leaping aside, he had gotten himself out of the vision of the man who had blown the dart at him, and that Prime, having seen his wife sink to the floor, supposed that Nick Carter had fallen also.

And then came the heavy thud of another body collapsing upon the floor, followed by another laugh.

"By Jove!" thought Nick. "The scoundrel has done for Potter already."

He stepped back quickly and silently through the door into the hall; then he hurried along it to the front door, arriving there just as Conner threw it open and entered; and they both turned to go back to the parlor again, when Prime appeared suddenly before them from the small room at the rear end of the hall.

For just one instant he stopped and stared, dazed by what he saw—Nick Carter and Con Conner both in the act of leaping toward him to seize him.

Then he brought that six-inch blow-pipe to his lips again, and——

Bang!

It was shivered into bits by the bullet from Nick Carter's pistol—one of those he carried in his sleeves. The poisoned dart did not have time to escape from it.

And then Nick leaped forward and seized the man in his arms.

He lifted him clear of his feet, and hurled him, head downward, upon the hard wood floor of the hallway.

Prime did not move when he struck, but lay quite still,

while Conner bent over him and snapped the handcuffs on his wrists. Then, between them they picked him up and carried him into the back parlor, where his wife was lying as she had fallen, and with every appearance of being dead.

"By Jove, I believe he has killed her!" said Conner.

"No fear of that," replied Nick. "It would have spoiled his plans to do that. She will come around all right. I am chiefly concerned about Potter just at present. He is in that room back of the hall. Go and see if you can find him. But first look here."

The detective pointed to two small holes through the partition.

"Look," he said again. "This is where he shot the dart out of the blow-gun, and this hole above it was for peeping. It explains why he did not see that I did not fall. His range of vision was too small. But evidently he had every confidence in Selim's blow-gun. Now go and get Potter while I put this woman on the couch."

"That is Scar-face, all right," said Conner, as he was turning away. "What a hideous face it is; and how twisted the body appears; eh?"

"Yes; but the scars will wash off and the body will straighten, you will find."

Conner returned in another moment bearing Potter in his arms.

But it needed only a glance for both men to know that the engraver was quite dead. The difference in the appearance of the two bodies, his and the woman's, was at once manifest.

"He has done for Potter, all right," said Conner.

"I am afraid so," replied Nick; "and I am also afraid that it settles our hash in the matter of the plates. We can probably make Scar-face tell where he thinks they are, but I do not believe he knows. He thought he did, or he would not have killed Potter, but I'll bet a good deal that Potter fooled him that time. Suppose you get some water, Con, and a little soap; you'll probably find some about here, somewhere. We'll wash his face while he is coming around, and he will know that it is all up with Mr. Anthony Prime, as well as with Scar-face."

It was about ten minutes later when Prime opened his eyes and looked around him.

His first glance fell upon Nick Carter, and he scowled.

"I suppose you think you've got me, Nick Carter; and you, Conner?" he said, with a leer, and in a rough voice that not in the least sounded like Prime's.

"Oh, yes, we've got you, all right, Mr. Prime," replied Nick.

"What's that? Prime? I don't know him. Who is he?"

For reply Nick held a hand-glass in front of the man's eyes, and told him to look.

He did so, and uttered a howl of rage; and then he began to curse wildly; and, while he was at his wildest, his wife sat up on the couch, and stared.

"Who is that man?" she demanded, after a moment. "Who is he?"

"That man," replied Nick, "is your husband. His name is Anthony Prime, not Horton. He has never permitted you to see his face, or to know that he was not a cripple. He had arranged this plot to kill me, and, after rendering you unconscious, and driving a dagger into me, he would have called the police, and you would have had to suffer for my murder. Don't you believe, Mrs. Prime, or Horton, if you prefer it, that your duty as a wife has been about filled, and that your duty to your fellow man is uppermost now? Don't you think that it is about time that you told all you know about that man, and gave him up to the law? Here is one of his victims, here on the floor, quite dead. Down at the morgue there is another, whom he ordered killed this afternoon; and there are other victims strewn along his path all over the world. Will you help us convict him, madam?"

She rose without a word and crossed over to where her husband was seated, guarded by Conner. For a moment she looked steadily into his face, and then she turned back again to the detective.

"Yes," she said. "I will help you."

"Thank you, madam."

The detective was right about Potter.

He had hidden the bonds and plates away where they could not be readily found.

But that Nick Carter did, eventually, discover them, every one who has a knowledge of his wonderful skill in locating lost articles of value can readily understand.

THE END.

The next number (587) will contain "A Dead Man's Secret; or, Nick Carter's Search for Counterfeit Plates."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

Young readers of this weekly who enjoy all manner of adventure will certainly listen with interest to the story of a traveler and hunter in the wilds of South Africa, which he relates in the following graphic manner:

"I had a bit of lion-hunting in Bechuanaland, near the River Molpo, on my last trip on big game shooting intent. I took with me only two Kaffir boys, a donkey, and a hunting and camping outfit. Lions were reported as being very numerous in the neighborhood, and I wanted to get a fine hide. I soon found what I wanted. One night I was awakened by the barking of our dogs, and the trampling of the oxen, who were trying to stampede. I picked up my Marlin repeating rifle and looked around for the cause of the row. In the dim light of the young moon I could distinguish the forms of three large animals against the sky on the ridge above my camp.

"They were lions, that was certain, and I shook up the drowsy Kaffirs to have the fires brightened up. The lions were too far away for a good shot, so I waited until morning. The flames of our fires soon glared over the hill, and the lions moved away over the ridge. I sat up the rest of the night trying to quiet the snorting and trembling oxen, Now and then the rumbling roar of a lion seemed to shake the earth. It is a sound which, once heard, is never to be forgotten.

"When it was light enough to move, I stepped out, and started a huge hyena, which was feasting on the bones of a deer near the camp. I popped him over, and after breakfast began to look for lion signs. I could find no clear trails, and went down toward the river.

"On my way, I was attracted by the extraordinary antics of a leopard, which was dancing a Highland fling in the open, entirely unmindful of me. He plowed the ground with his head, reared on his hind legs, whirled over and over, all the time tearing at his throat with his fore paws and crying like a big cat.

"This all amazed me beyond measure, but I appreciated the chance, and lost no time in ending this performance with two bullets. I proceeded to investigate, and found a reason for his antics. The luckless leopard had tackled a porcupine with more gusto than discretion, and one of the quills had worked in under the root of the leopard's tongue. The torture of the great cat must have been awful, and it could not have lived long.

"On the following day I was laid up with an attack of fever, which kept me in camp for some time. The lions came round again during my illness, but as there was plenty of game about, did not molest me in any way. I was not strong in body, but dead set in purpose, when I finally got out after these animals. To hear them roar night after night had driven me nearly frantic, while my oxen were almost crazy.

"One morning I was able to stroll toward the hills, and came suddenly upon a lion lying on a rock and looking the picture of majestic comfort. His muzzle was stretched straight toward me, between his huge paws, and his tawny mane and yellow body and his position so blended into the brown rocks and yellow hill that I was almost upon him before I knew what I had walked into.

"His lordship was wide-awake, however, and the instant he knew that I had seen him, he leaped into the air and bounded away, giving me no time, in the state of my nerves, to get a good shot. I fired, of course, but knew I had missed. I found a half-eaten carcass by the rock, evidently killed the night before, and I tracked the bloody trail, which came from the direction of the veldt.

"Here was a chance too good to lose, and I decided to return at dusk and 'lie up' by the carcass. My experience has taught me that in an uncertain light the best shot cannot count on landing a bullet, and that in the dusk and at short range buckshot is effective for most game. I prepared several shells for my ten-gage gun, chambering the shot and packing it solid with eland grease. Of course, I took my carbine also. I told my boys to stay by the camp, for I could not rely on them, and in the twilight I clambered among some boulders, at a distance of about twenty paces from the half-eaten body, facing the route taken by the lion when I had disturbed him in the morning. The carcass had not been disturbed.

"I crawled into a crack between two rocks and settled myself to wait and to think. For the silence and loneliness of the scene were unspeakably impressive.

"Two hours dragged by like two years, and then suddenly the lion loomed over a rock beyond me. In the subdued light he looked as big as a house, standing chest full on, his head in air. It was the grandest picture in my memory. Then he roared, and the sound echoed and reechoed among the rocks, and seemed to shake them and the ground all around me. By daylight the lion is not imposing; at night he is the grandest of beasts. This lion stood fully a minute, and I was sorely tempted to fire, but he was too fine a spectacle. He satisfied himself that the field was clear, and he

walked leisurely down to his dinner. Placing his paw on the carcass, he turned in my direction, and gave a long roar of defiance—a sort of royal proclamation. This was my opportunity, and he dropped without a groan, with both charges buried full in his chest.

"Hunting in Africa is the hardest work a man can attempt, but I have enjoyed it, despite all its hardships, insects, fever, awful traveling and occasional dangers."

Even such tricks as hiding jewels in hollow shoe-heels or swallowing diamonds cannot longer be depended upon to cheat customs officials.

In the French Government tests of the X-ray detective of Alphonse le Roux, persons representing smuggling passengers have been examined without removal of clothing or any indignity except being detained a few moments before the apparatus, and so rapid is the process that 167 persons received attention in forty-five minutes. On these individuals were articles of many kinds, variously concealed.

Watches were revealed in the lining of a man's coat, rings in the hem of a woman's skirt, a tiny locket under a young man's tongue, watch-chains and a bracelet in the coils of a woman's hair, card-cases in a man's shoes, and even buttons—proving the presence of gloves—under the clothing over a man's chest. Tried on postal packages, without breaking seals or untying strings, all kinds of improper articles were shown in the most innocent-looking and unlikely hiding-places.

An interesting but most cruel object of punishment may be found in the council-chamber of the town hall at Forfar, which is generally known as the "Witch's Bridle." This is a kind of cage made of flat iron bars, into which the head of the unhappy sorceress was thrust, a lock at the back securing and keeping it in position. The mouthpiece in this instance is made of iron plate, studded with sharp spikes, which caused great suffering to the woman if she tried to speak. As soon as the victim had been condemned to death for witchcraft this bridle was placed over her face and she was led through the town by a short chain, to be mocked and made the butt of all who saw her, after which she would be publicly strangled and burned. The latest record of an execution of a supposed witch at Forfar, in Scotland, was in the year 1662.

The up-to-date burglar is an artist in crime, and the tools he possesses are both interesting and remarkable. It is well known to the police that there are several men in Europe who make a living by devising new instruments for the perpetration of crime, and the instruments are bought and generally used profitably by the modern burglar.

In Manchester, a short time ago, a burglar who entered an office melted out the lock of the safe there by means of currents taken from the electric-light wires. His apparatus was beautifully made and fitted with platinum wire. An electrician who examined it after the burglar had been captured and the tool found upon him, considered it the finest electric-melting implement ever constructed.

Another interesting case was the entry of thieves into the post-office of Tottenham Court Road, who melted open the door in a remarkable way. Armed with a length of rubber tubing, a blowpipe, and a cylinder of oxygen, they fitted the tubing to a gas-jet, connected it with the oxygen cylinder, and directed the flame through the blowpipe upon the door of the safe. And it melted the chilled steel as if it were wax.

A professional "drugger" of the fair sex, arrested recently, always carried with her a beautiful bouquet of flowers. This she presented to her victims to smell. They remembered nothing for an hour or more afterwards. The flowers were sprinkled with a subtle poison.

Mexican thieves are to be complimented on having discovered a new variety in the art of thieving, which smacks somewhat of the humorous.

A short time since, a traveler going through one of the less frequented streets in the capital in broad daylight, was suddenly seized by three tolerably well-dressed men, who very politely, but decidedly, requested him to divest himself of his coat and hand it over to them. There was no such thing as resisting the peremptory demand, so the coat was handed over, and one of the "gentlemen" hurried away with it, while the other two detained the stranger. After the lapse of a few minutes the former returned, and with a polite bow handed the traveler a paper, saying:

"Sir, we don't want your coat, but only the five dollars, for which sum it has been pawned. Here is the ticket, and, considering that your coat is at least worth double that amount, you cannot do less than be satisfied with the bargain, for you manifestly profit by it."

Bowing gracefully once more, the three confederates decamped, and the stranger hurried away in his shirt-sleeves to the pawnbroker's shop in order to immediately redeem his coat from the contents of his well-filled purse, which the amiable band had left in his possession.

WHALE-HUNTING.

"'Twas on my second v'yage," remarked the old captain, "that I had the most 'str'ordinary 'sperience with whales o' my life. We wus two weeks out o' port and had been onto whalin'-ground for a week, but nothin' sighted. We were gittin' to be a leetle restless, when the watch sung out one arternoon: 'Thar she blows! Thar she breaches!' 'Whar away?' called the mate. 'Four p'ints to leeward.'

"Thar in the distance, more'n two miles, several whales wuz a-spoutin'. 'Stand to and lower!' the cap'n shouted. Two boats wuz got ready. I took an oar in the cap'n's. As we drew near three monsters wuz rollin' in the brine.

"'Peak the bow!' the old man ordered.

"The steerer wuz on his pins at wunct, seized the harpoon, and lunged it straight. The huge fellow shook, heaved, then sounded. Hows'ever he didn't go down far. Comin' up near, the boat swung aroun', and the cap'n druv home his lance when the whale shortly rolled over dead.

"The others had disappeared, but soon one rose, nearly twice as big as the other, and made for us. She rode our boat, crushin' it to bits, killin' two of our men. All on us, in course, wuz knocked into the sea. Reachin' the surface the mate's boat soon pulled us in; and then we made for the ship, 'cause some on us needed the sargeon's sarvices. The dead whale wuz towed to our ship. 'Twas a young 'un, 'bout forty feet long.

"We'd no more'n boarded the ship than its dam, which had spilled us into the sea, 'peared. She plunged close agin' us, open'd her tremedjus jaws, and tried to gobble up the vessel. The mate druv an iron into her, when she lashed the sea with her 'normous flukes, ter'bly smitin' the side o' the ship, makin' it quiver from stem to starn.

"Then she sounded. Presently she rose a half a mile away. Millin' aroun' a minit, she started straight for us. Quicker an' quicker she cum. 'Hard down with the helm!' shouted the cap'n.

"There wuz time to shift position but a trifle afore she bunted us abaft, makin' the craft reel, hurlin' every one on us from our feet, and ser'usly seamin' the vessel. The cap'n this time wuz too quick for her, 'cause he sent the lance deep, and afore she could gather herself for another charge she rolled over dead.

"Bein' then as we wuz pretty consider'bly crippled we put into the nighest port for repairs.

"Resoomin' our voyage, one arternoon at six bells we wuz brought to our feet by the cry of the watch at the masthead. 'Thar she breaches!' 'Whar away?' asked the cap'n. 'Two p'ints off port quarter.'

"A comp'ny o' whales had suddenly cum to the surface and wuz playin' togither. One arter another would h'ist himself outen the water. Then a monster would throw himself completely out, fallin' on his side like the noise o' distant thunder. Boats were lowered. 'Now pull, my booties!' urged the cap'n to us as wuz at the oars. 'That's it! Send her along. Now you're workin'. Pull, I tell you. I'll guv you my farm to hum.' The nigher we cum the more excited the cap'n grew. 'Lift her away. You hain't pullin' uv her a pound. I'll discharge every man o' ye ef ye don't pull.' But we wuz pullin' fit to break our backs; and, lor', the old man didn't know what he was a-sayin'. 'Pull, my hearties. You're my men.' Another swing and we wuz in position. 'Peak her bow. Stand up. Send the iron into him,' was the command. The steerer hove it into him. 'Starn all!' shouted the old man. The whale, a ter'ble big one, pounded the sea in mad fury, and then sounded. How he went down!

"The line—as is, you know, knotted to the harpoon—paid out over the boat's side like greased lightnin'. I wuz nigh the cap'n. The strangest things happen those times. I were a-reachin' over when, quicker'n you can wink, a coil of rope struck me up my arm aroun' the shoulder. Like a flash I went over the gunwale and down, down.

"It 'peared as though my shoulder 'u'd be torn from my body, so terrific wuz the strain, as the whale pulled me swifter'n a cannon-ball down through the water. What feelin's I had! A stream o' fire seemed to rush past my hot eyeballs. A roar and crash different nor any sound I ever heerd in the air filled my ears.

"My head beat with pain nigh onto burstin'. My veins swelled and run with liquid fire. Bein's as my shoulder wuz crunched in such a viselike grip, my left hand wuz helpless. I tried ter'bly to seize my knife and cut the line, but the resistance o' the water wuz paralyzin'.

"Ag'in and ag'in I put forth my hull strength, but my right arm couldn't be moved no more nor ef it had a bin pinyuned to my side. 'Whar wuz I a-goin' down, forever down with this mad v'locity?' I asked myself. The blood seemed ready to leap from my temples. My mind got a trifle flurried. My fancy, stimerlated by the strangeness o' my feelin's and the terror o' my condition, wrought out o' the impressions injooced on my senses new ideas. For a time I thought I wuz bein' swept throo some strange ether whar' blazin' worlds set the air aglow and filled it with a piercin' and painful magnetism.

"'This be the end o' the world, and this be the chariot o' fire,' wuz my wanderin' fancies.

"Suddenly the whale slacked his descent. My mind cum back. My detarmination to grab my knife from my belt for to slash myself free resoomed itself. I seized the handle, drew the blade athwart the rope, which but partly severed the strands.

"The whale felt the pull and begun ag'in the awful plunge. But the desp'ration o' the moment, the hope o' liberty, the prospect ag'in o' life guv mightier power to my arm, and one more lightnin' sweep o' my knife loosed me from my captor.

"'How fur down wuz I?' The Lord only knows.

"The dead-weight pressure o' the ocean away in those depths wuz somethin' horrible. But inwoluntar'ly, automatic'ly, as science men w'u'd say, my limbs all worked savin' the left arm. I was arisin'; the pressure was a-lessenin'. When I reached the top o' the wave, arter what 'peared to me an age but r'a'ly a brief space o' time, I fainted dead away. But my comrades were a-looking out for me. And when I cum to I was aboard o' the vessel attended by the ship's sargeon."

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